

* 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.

MELINDA

My hope has always been that you get some sort of insight across to those that have been fortunate enough to never have experienced violence of any sort. Violence is like a spider's web. There are other implications that are never thought of and can equally destroy a person's life. People need to know it is very complex, messy, and sticky.

I should start at the beginning. Father was violent. Mum recalled that one time she was in the kitchen with me, I was a baby in her arms. Father came up and he hit me and I went flying. I slid across the floor and underneath the old cabinet that we had in the kitchen. My head bashed against the cabinet. When I was little a kid, I started running over to the neighbours and I would yell, "mummy's being beaten up by daddy". I had to do this because we didn't have a telephone in the house. I tried many neighbours and knocked on many doors to try and use their phone to get help. But they all said, "get lost, go away". My next-door neighbour once came out of her house, she smelt with all this heavy perfume and I said, "my dad is hurting mummy". Her husband came up behind her and said, "Debbie, get inside. It's got nothing to do with us". And she went back inside and he slammed the door in my face. I felt so dejected that I turned around and just walked back inside again and got back into my house again to get at father while he was dragging mum down the floor. So that is my first memory of asking for help, and help being denied to me.

I have a vivid memory of being four years old, father was up the hall, and he was belting and bashing mum. I ran out the back and jumped up on the fence and then onto the roof. I raced across the roof

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and remembering to stand because they were sheets of iron, because you could accidentally walk on the nails and so that's why you had to walk the proper way. I would go from there. Then I jumped to the next-door neighbours' roof, raced across that, then I jumped onto their side fence part, jumped down again and then raced as fast as I could down to the telephone booth and rang the Police and then I came back to the house. When the Police finally turned up, they just said to my father, "oh, you've been a naughty boy. You've been knocking the missus around". It was ridiculous, they would just dismiss it. I soon learned that they don't care. They're not going to help you. You're on your own. That's why I had to do the fighting.

I am a fighter. I hear of other people, when they were kids, they hid under the bed. But I was out there giving as good as was going on. That's why I copped a lot of beltings and bashings because I'd get in there into the furore of everything that was going on and I would be there like a hindrance

“Get out of the bloody way”. I’d come back and punch father or kick him or whatever. That was what I learnt. That’s just what I had to do. I always had my teddy to cry into him.

When I was still a kid, maybe eight years of age, a doctor gave me tablets for my ‘nerves’ and they said that I was “highly strung”. That’s it, I was “highly strung”. I’d have these medicines to calm me down. Mum took me to a specialist, who told me I had to do grounding exercises every time I felt I was going to lose it, which would have been to disassociate. I had to stand with my legs apart and say, “My name is Melinda and I live in North Brisbane, my name is Melinda and I live in North Brisbane”.

I really liked the TV show, *Lost In Space*. That was my thing I would escape into. I’d become Penny in *Lost In Space*. For that time, I could just lose myself. I also had problems with my kidneys. The doctors said “she won’t live... She’ll be dead by the time she’s eight”. So, I wasn’t allowed to learn to swim. I wasn’t allowed to go out in the playground, and I had to sit inside for lunch. I wasn’t allowed to sit on the concrete and because of my kidneys I couldn’t lay down for too long. I had no immune system and I was sick with everything. Even when I was in high school after I’d gone past the age of eight, I was averaging some 35 days at school. I was ill all the time. I had no childhood.

Father worked and mum didn’t. My father would get all the money because he was also a gambler. So, when he got paid, I would have to wait until he had fallen asleep. From an early age, maybe two years of age, I used to go down on my stomach crawling in commando style, one arm over the other. I was really quiet. I would go into the bedroom and

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then I would have to put my hand up and gently bring his trousers down onto the ground, then get my hand into his pocket which had all the pennies. I would gently pull it back up again and sneak back out again. I used to do that, so we got extra money. In the morning he never really remembered anything, and he would always say “I thought I had more money than that”.

Because mum never had any Valentine’s Days gifts from dad, I used to make her a Valentine’s Day card. I pretended I was a secret admirer and then go and give it to her. I’d sneak out through the door because our doors had a bit of a leeway in between, probably about half an inch, and I’d put the card out and I’d bring it so it could just be seen from the inside from under the door. Then I would knock, knock, knock on the door and I would run like hell to my room. And mum would say, “I wonder who it is?” I would have been somewhere between three and four years of age.

But I used to do that just so that she had something. When I was eight years of age, father had bashed and belted mum so much that he was told by the Doctors that if he’d lay a hand on her again, he would kill her. Mum was in and out of hospital. She averaged 17 operations in three years.

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She had bits of her bowel removed and her bladder. She was an absolute mess. I had to support mum when I was ten years old. She had a transverse colostomy, which is the colostomy bag. But they were a lot different back then. I was the one who had to get up with her through the night, clean her down and bathe her and change her and everything. The colostomy bag was a wild one which meant it would spurt. It would spurt onto the ceiling, on the walls. It would spurt on me, and mum had an open raw wound round it. She was crying and she wanted to kill herself. Had to stop her once when she was about to throw herself out a moving car. It was just dreadful. I was so frightened that she'd die, and I would be on my own. I didn't want to leave her and we were like Siamese twins with everything.

That was the thing with mum, because she didn't talk to anyone, she would talk to me. She talked to me of really graphic things when I was too young to know about them. She had all those troubles, and she never had any help from her father. I was so much a part of mum. I had no separate identity. I didn't see myself as a separate. We were just one, always just meshed together as one. Like telepathy between each other. My father had backed off hurting my mum at this stage and I was the target then.

I basically grew up with the Murrays who lived around the corner. Mr Murray was a procurer of women, including his wife, who he pushed into prostitution. He would bash the Christ out of them. Even though times were hard for all of the women, they still kept an eye out for each other and for me. Because my mum had been bashed too much and she was too ill, the women from Mr Murrays place would come in and they would take me and they would feed me, bath me and they came down and would help Mum and go do her shopping. They were a strong group of women who would do everything for each other. At the same time, I would see things that I shouldn't see. I saw Mr Murray come down and have his little interlude with Mrs Heart.

The women who stayed there, fed me and did all the shopping. I used to dread it when it was time for me to go home. I was only little. When I had to leave to go home, I was all alone again. With those women I had some closeness, and we would be able to comfort each other and then it was over. I was left at home on my own again.

Mr Murray had put his own daughter, Carey, out to prostitution from the age of 13. One time I was over at the Murrays and Carey came over to me and she said, "dad wants to see you". And I followed her into the bedroom, which was this dark room. I remember going up the side of the bed and I always remember the wardrobe and then I can't remember anything more. But I knew what had happened. After that I remember I'm at home and then mum said I'd come home and I was bleeding and I needed a stitch, but she wouldn't let them stitch me.

Domestic and family violence is an injustice and is an offence to my dignity, compromising my safety and undermining my wellbeing... and the dignity and wellbeing of the people I care for and who care for me. *Follow My Lead*

When I was 19 years old, Carey turned up on the doorstep. She had run away and came over to us. Carey was black and blue. Some John had bashed the hell out of her. We hadn't seen her bruises until we were having a bath. We were very Victorian. It was the old copper. You had to boil the copper, then with a basin get the water out and put it into the bathtub. We had no hot running water, showers or anything like that, and it wasn't until Carey got into the bath that we happened to look in and all her back was smothered in bruises. And then mum pulled me back and she said, "that's it, she's gone". Because mum, with those sorts of things, had no humanity. I was brought up the Victorian way, brimstones and all the rest of it; "You tell a lie, you're going to hell" and "You look

at the curtains and you think of Mother England” and all of that and “you only have sex to have a child.” And then “men want it all the time, so you just have to just lay there”. But I was upset. After Carey left, she wrote to us asking to live with us again because she was pregnant. I said to Mum, “I have to write to her”. Mum said “No, you don’t. Don’t respond to her”. Again, I thought this was cruel and as much as it hurt me, I threw the letter away and that was that.

Before father came home, I would put that record on and I’d have it blaring. And I would be singing, “Saturday night” to psych myself up because I knew what was coming.

I remember as a teenager we had the Friday night and Saturday night specials. They were the full on, cops called and everything else. You’ve probably heard of the *Bay City Rollers*? I used to go to their concerts. Anyway, there was this one song that they did, a rehash of the song *Saturday Night*. So, on Friday and Saturday night, before father came home, I would put that record on and I’d have it blaring. And I would be singing, “Saturday night” to psych myself up because I knew what was coming. That was my thing, just blare it out and get it all out and get myself ready for the rumble. That was my little ritual. So, I had that anthem going.

The way I stood up, was always physical and that music helped psych me up, that amazing music. Because I was never backward in coming forward. When I was a teenager, I started to like boys, but I had to keep that quiet and I didn’t say anything. Because I thought I was betraying mum. But then one day I put a

poster up of the *Bay City Rollers*. It was hard because I was showing that I had feeling for blokes when we were living in this situation. I thought, “oh god no, that’s bad”. So, domestic violence affects your sexuality. I held my feelings in because I didn’t want to be seen as betraying mum. I was trying to protect mum. All I could think of is betrayal; “Hadn’t I learned anything? You don’t just put a bloke up on the wall”. I also felt like “I’m not normal”. I’m living in these conditions and then I say that I’m attracted to males. Or I’m attracted to a woman, or whatever. There is a big barrier again. And then for years afterwards, I used to say to myself, “maybe you are a lesbian?” And I had lingering doubts for years that maybe I was. It was just I didn’t want to betray mum and put up a picture of a bloke on the wall while we were living amongst all this shit. So, in a way, the *Bay City Rollers* freed me. Just by putting that poster on the wall, it allowed me to be me. It gave me another avenue to cope. I mean at the time I would not have thought of that. But, looking back at it, subconsciously, it gave me the power. Sticking that *Bay City Rollers* poster up and then playing their *Saturday Night* song.

So, I had become a very good strategist. I had to be because that was how I grew up. You had to plan things. It was warfare and if you didn’t plan your attacks and plan your strategies, you were dead. I think to myself now, “you’re pretty clever.” Dad and mum were always fighting, and mum was drunk, so they basically wouldn’t remember much of anything. When I was 17, I came up with a plan to get rid of father. Mum never knew that I’d staged and planned the whole thing just to get rid of him. I had to do something. Because the Police wouldn’t do anything. So, I knew I had to start the fight. I didn’t know how it was going to end. I had no clue, just to incite it and start it and get the ball rolling. It was a Saturday night and the night before Mother’s Day. Father was ranting and raving in the kitchen. He started arguing with mum and he punched mum in the breast. Father was walking through the house to take out the garbage bins. I came out from the bedroom and I put my leg out and he stumbled over it. I attacked him. He started strangling me with his hands and slamming my

head up against the brick wall at the same time. I started to slide down the wall because I'm starting to pass out. I had long fingernails and, this might sound gross, I got my hand and fingernails into the sides of his cheeks. I dug my nails in and I slowly pulled my hand down and his flesh was curling underneath my fingernails. His blood was running down my fingers as I dragged them down. He was choking me. I was slowly crumbling to the floor, but finally he let go. I was then able to run and get myself back up again and then it was on again. We ended up fighting out the front door, down the stairs, out onto the street. We were on the road and I quickly glanced up for some reason. There was a car coming. The next minute I'm out on the road with this car bearing down, but I had enough wits to roll, so I rolled myself to the other side. My dad was coming across the road after the car and then he lifted me and then flicked me across the road. And then Mr Smith came out from next door and he started yelling "what's going on, what's going on?" And then father was there with his blood running down his face. But I achieved what I wanted to achieve and I got the Police to come out.

When the Police arrived, they decided to lock father up for the night, which was a godsend because, every other time the Police came they did nothing. I showed the Police all the marks I had on my throat where he'd choked me. They took a lot of photos. I was taken to hospital. I was in hospital for two weeks and had to lay completely flat and then go into that corset thing. This injury still causes me problems. I've now got spinal canal stenosis of the whole spine and it's all full of osteoarthritis and everything else. I have to have a lot of injections into the spine and stuff to ease the pain. I also developed epilepsy from all the constant hits to my head, being smashed up against brick walls and stuff. I keep calling it centrencephalic epilepsy, which is the same epilepsy that the boxers get from being constantly boxed around the head. I've got the all clear now, because it's been over 20 years since my last seizure. So, I don't have to take medications. But going back to that time. Father was taken to court and 'bound over' for 12 months, which is similar to an AVO. He had a list of all the things that he was or wasn't allowed to do. Mum and I went to Court to be at father's hearing. We didn't have any money. Whatever money we had it was just enough to buy a chocolate éclair and a Danish tart. Mum and I were sitting in court eating our cakes while he was being bound over.

In January 1981 I was at home and walked down the driveway and saw these two men got out of the car and approached me. They said they were detectives from Brisbane, and they asked for my name and asked to search the house. I was shocked and didn't ask them any questions. They asked to see my jewellery and everything else. The detectives said they were looking for me because apparently, I had been all over the country and racked up a million dollars in bills and stolen jewellery. The detectives said, "we need you to come to Brisbane CBD". Mum said she couldn't come with me and so I rang Ellen, my aunty, and she agreed to meet me at the station. That night, mum said, "it doesn't sound too good. I think you're going to go to jail. You know what will happen to you in jail, don't you?" And I said, "no". She said, "you'll get raped. You'll be raped by everybody". Then mum said, "You'd better prepare yourself, so go up and have sex with him". She meant Dan who lived next door. Meeting him was the worst thing ever. Whatever I wanted or needed, never came into the equation at all. My one and only concern was only ever my

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mother. I did it because mum told me to. I did my duty, came back home. I had to do what mum told me. My existence was mum and I didn't exist. I was mum.

The next day I met aunty Ellen and we walked out to the Brisbane CBD Police station. The Police had a man with them and they asked him "is this her?" And he looked at me and said, "no, that's not her". So that was how I got off the hook. He said, the woman he had seen looked completely different to me. The Police showed me a sketch of her and she really didn't really look much like me but because she had my date of birth and everything else, she was passing off as me. She actually stole my identity and she was racking up in all major hotels, the big hotels, a hundred thousand in jewellery. The Police were trying to catch her. But the deed was done with Dan and I was sent back home again. Going next door to Dan destroyed me, because I was worthless then. He would demand sex whenever he wanted it, whether it was in a drain or really degrading places. I didn't want to marry him. I thought "I'm going to have to. Nobody else is going to want you". In my mind, I was worthless anyway. Then mum would say, "you don't need to buy milk when you've got the cow" and other derogatory things to me.

I look back now and I think how mum was a perpetrator too. By the time we had moved up the coast mum was a total alcoholic. I would sit there and when she would pass out, I would cry. I had looked after mum since I was eight, and when you look after someone for all those years and had no respite, I shouldn't say it, but I hated it. I would get jobs, really good jobs, and then I would have to leave them because mum would be too ill, or she was too intoxicated. I remember Christmas 1985, mum woke me up at some ungodly hour, four o'clock in the morning, and for some reason I was sleeping in the lounge room. And she turned the light on. She said to me, "who the hell are you?" I said, "I'm your daughter". She said, "no, my daughter's dead. Get out". And so, I thought, "shit. I've got to get out". I went down the road and called up the doctor and said, "I don't know what to do, mum's throwing me out". And he said, "I'll give you the number for the women's refuge on the Gold Coast". I ended up getting a taxi and going there and spending a week or so at this refuge and ended up having Christmas dinner, which was sent over to us from the people who make meals for the jails.

**"no, my daughter's
dead. Get out".**

Meanwhile, mum ended up taking father back. I came back for some reason or another, to see mum. Mum came into the room and I said, "you've taken him back? I refuse. I'm not coming back. You'll have to get rid of him". And mum chose him, which really, I was so distressed about, but there was

**"Your mum is in
hospital
somewhere or
another".**

nothing I could do. I was heartbroken. And then out of the blue, I don't know why, but mum goes, "I've told him too how you told me he molested you". Then father came in. He said, "your mother said that I've molested you" and I thought, "I don't remember that. Where's this coming from?" We moved up the coast, with mum's alcoholism and being so sick, we never knew she was diabetic until she started having diabetic turns. And then she had three little strokes as well. I could swear she had Alzheimer's as well.

Mum would get really violent, and she would make up lots of things. She went around behind me and picked up an aerosol can and with the very base of it, she slammed it down on the back of my head. I went down to the floor and then picked myself up again. Then she slammed the phone into my head, the base of the phone. She was becoming really violent. She tried to strangle me with a thin belt that she had on one of the dressers. There wasn't anything I could do because she always came up behind me. You don't expect that. I never lost it with mum. I would just bottle everything up. When mum wasn't at home, father burnt stacks and stacks of papers trying to find her will. I

knew where the will was because I was the executor and I was getting everything, so I had her will with me. Father said, "if I don't get this house blah, blah, blah". Father actually murdered my mum. Father hit her on Mother's Day, again, that day falls into a lot of things. It was Mother's Day 1989 just before her 59th birthday. I got a phone call from father he just said, "Your mum is in hospital somewhere or another" he didn't know where she was. I had to ring the local Hospital and they had said, a woman came in fitting mum's description, they said "we don't know who she is". My mum was a Jane Doe. They said they couldn't do anything with her and sent her to the larger hospital in the city. Anyway, I rang up Brisbane hospital and they said, "yes, a Jane Doe came in" and I said, "I'm sure it's my mother". My aunty went down to identify mum and said, yes, "that's her". I then went down to the Police and they knew father was the perpetrator, they said, "we know he's done it because the injuries don't correspond with haemorrhaging in the brain" and there were marks.

Mum was unconscious in a coma on life support. They doctor asked, "what do you want me to do?" And they told me that if she did come out of the coma, she'll just be a vegetable. I said, "Mum won't be a vegetable". I said, "let her go". After I had spoken with the doctors, I told mum and I said to her "Mum. Don't hold on. Just let go". And she squeezed my hand. She heard me. It was really heart breaking. The doctors and specialists agreed, they disconnected all the equipment, put her in a room, and then she died. After mum had died, they had to do an autopsy of course. I was cranky at that because when I was talking to them, they didn't refer to her by her name. She was "the body". They kept saying "we're going to do an autopsy on the body".

I am always aware of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members. These responses inform how, or if, I reach out to others. *Follow My Lead*

When I first met Dan we went for a walk down the reserve and he told me of an incident where the Police grabbed him and said that he had been identified as the rapist who was raping women in the reserve. I didn't think anything of it at the time. When we would walk out together, I never stood with him. I always stood paces behind, like you see in other cultures, where the man walks in front and the woman walks ten paces behind. That's what I would do when I went out walking with him. And he would take advantage of that because we would be just walking down the street and he would meet up with some woman that he liked. He would start up a conversation with her and be arranging a date with her. All the while, I'm standing back. Half the time someone would say "who's that?", wondering why I am standing in the distance. Dan would just say "Oh, she's nobody".

I married Dan to escape the violence at home and I thought, well, "I've slept with Dan. No one's going to want me". But to marry him was the worst thing ever. Dan hit me before we got married. I was very much influenced by that Victorian thinking that women are just chattel. At that time there were still all these societal beliefs that the woman is the man's property, and you can do whatever you want to them and the kids. So, that was to be my life. You don't question, you just do. By that time, mum was dead and father was dead too.

No matter where I was with Dan, he would make me have sex with him. If Dan and I went for a bush walk, you'd have it two or three times in the bush. If he walked past a gutter or anything, you'd be down in the gutter. He wasn't the type of person you could touch or even just brush past. You would have to have sex with him because of that. I had to do it. I had to use Valium to survive.

I fell pregnant and I had Sally and then soon after I had John. When John was six weeks old, I fell pregnant with Jane. So, by the time Jane was born, Sally was only two years and three months. So, I had basically been pregnant for three years. When I was having Jane, at about four months, I was in

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absolute agony because all my innards were still pushed around after having the other kids. I woke up one morning in pain and I was begging Dan to get the doctor. I was in so much pain I just wanted an abortion. Dan kept telling me to shut up. The next night when I came to bed, Dan had sex with me. Then Dan kicked me out of our bed using his foot. He said I would wake him up with all the agony I was in. So, from the that time onwards, I had to sleep at the foot of the bed, on the floor, with some cushions under my bum. The only time Dan would let me come into bed was when he wanted sex, which was every night. But I had to stay at the end of the bed, because I apparently interfered with his sleep. Dan was constantly walking around touching himself. He would masturbate throughout the house, all the time, even when he was

on the telephone. He would be on the phone, touching himself, then he would pull his hand out, smell it and put it back again. He would come over to me and try to put my hand down his pants. And my son, John, said to me a couple of times, “what’s daddy got his hand down his pants for”?

In the mornings, when I was a bit further along with Jane, I had Sally and John in their highchairs. And I’d be feeding one, feeding the other, and then vomiting into the bucket. Then I would have to clean myself up. My brain had just closed off and I just did it. I would just do it, just to get it over and done with. And then get back to the floor. The one thing that I’ve always done, and I still do it to this day, is when I did lay in bed, I lay right on the edge of the bed, and just hold on, barely hold on. It was my way of getting myself away from Dan.

“I’m going to bring you all home from school one day and I’m going to have your mother tied up and I’m going to kill her in front of you”.

When Jane was little, she came up to me and said “oh, mummy, look what Daddy taught me” and then she said, “daddy hates me”. And Dan would be going, “yes, that’s my girl”. I would lock Sally into her room of a night-time. I had to try and get all the kids to sleep. I would say to her “just stay quiet, don’t come out”. And then I’d have to go between the kids two other rooms. Once I’d got John settled down, Dan would be at Jane and then Jane would be screaming. So, I would have to go in and I’d settle her down and then Dan would be at John. One time I came in and Dan had his hands over John’s nose and his mouth and he was punching John full force into his chest. So, I had to stop Dan. Meanwhile, Jane was screaming, “mummy, mummy, mummy”. So, then I had to get Jane

up on my hip and go and sit with John. That was every bloody night. Dan told me “you can’t ring up the Police. You can’t tell anybody, because they’ll take the kids off you”. Dan refused to have anything to do with looking after the kids. So, it was really difficult, because I brought the kids up on my own. Dan would never get them up. He would never change a nappy. He would never feed them. He would never do anything with them, except scream, yell, hit, and carry on. Dan used to use a long sword from the basement. He would line me and the kids up. We were on our knees with our hands behind our back. Then Dan would run the long sword across our throats. Sometimes he would pull a hair out of John’s head. Once he picked up our pet cat. Dan held the cat up by his ears and he said, “oh, I’ll cut his head with my sharp blade, in front of the kids”. He said if John wasn’t quiet, he would bash him. Dan would terrify John with all these things. He would also say to all the kids “I’m

going to bring you all home from school one day and I'm going to have your mother tied up and I'm going to kill her in front of you".

I was working full time. But I would dread every afternoon and evening when I would see Dan's shoes walking down from the stairs. That's when I knew it was on for young and old. He would come in the door, slam the door, go downstairs, have a shower, and piss off for about two hours to his friend Anthony's house, I assumed. I had to get home to get the kids ready, bathed, homework done and fed and make sure the house was all tidy before Dan came back at 6pm. When Dan got back, he would always carry on, "what's this shit for dinner". It was just absolutely none stop.

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

Dan's whole family said to me, "it's not him, it's you". Dan was their golden boy. His lot knew what he was doing to us. But his family were misogynists, and he was cruel. Dan's parents had this little Chihuahua, called "Benny" and Dan's dad would pick Benny up and he'd shake the life out of him. And then he'd throw him to the ground. Dan told me about one night his dad, Wayne, forced him to eat his dinner. There were still some peas left on the plate. So, Wayne said to Dan "eat your peas". Dan ate the peas but soon after vomited the peas back up. And then his father made him eat the vomit.

For the first ten years of my kids' lives, they would do exactly what Dan used to do. My son John would attack Jane with knives, and I would have to stop them from trying to stab each other. I took all my kids to see counsellors. I think that helped them a bit. We saw a psychologist, Miriam, her way of doing things was with art and drawing with the kids. But you get to the stage where you go to counsellors, and you do all your spiels, and you get sick of it. Especially the kids, they all said "enough. I'm not doing this anymore". They started resenting me for taking them, to try and get them to unburden themselves, and learn strategies. In the end they refused.

I eventually kicked Dan out. He was supposed to be going out with his best mate, Anthony, to dinner on the Friday night. But he didn't come home until the Sunday night. I had been ringing all the pubs trying to find him. I rang Anthony and he just said, "oh, no, he's not with me". When Dan finally came home, he had love bites all over him. I'm not a drinker, but Dan had left two stubbies of beer, which I drank quickly. That's when I confronted him about the woman he had been living with and had a kid with. I virtually got him by the scruff of the neck and the arse of his pants, pushed him up the stairs to the first floor and threw him out of the door.

We had to face losing the house. Because I didn't have any money, I was selling the refrigerator, the washing machine, just to get some food. I also put a stall on the mortgage. I had to call in a charity service to try and help us. But to this day I don't know why, they refused to help me. They said, I "have a house and just need to sell it". So, I had to sell the house for the same price I bought it for and pay the mortgage and everything else. Then we ended up in a rental property that was, oh, my God, the only one we could find that was close to the school. It had birds living in the roof, and we all got lice. Then the kids broke out in all these sores. We probably stayed there for six months. Anthony, Dan's friend, drove around every afternoon. So, we were being stalked.

For a whole year we went through the family court. I think there were three court sessions in total. I was being funded by Legal Aid. Legal Aid were also paying for separate solicitors for the kids.

The last Judge we had said that it was “the worst case of child abuse” he had ever seen in the whole time he was on the Bench.

So, they all had their own lawyers. I had my lawyer. At first, they were doing all those things trying to see whether or not I had manipulated the kids and told them what to say. But then when the three of them sat in there differently, the lawyers said that “there’s no way that she could have brainwashed them into saying that”. The last Judge we had said that it was “the worst case of child abuse” he had ever seen in the whole time he was on the Bench.

I was lucky, that Dan was never allowed to come near the kids. Also, none of his family or any third parties were allowed near the kids until they had turned 16 years of age, until the age the kids themselves decide whether or

not they want contact. I was extremely lucky and blessed to be able to get a result like that. After that I did the kids for the compensation. And I finally got each of my kids \$45,000 each in compensation. My claim just fell by the wayside, because I didn’t have any proof. I just got bypassed the whole time. Yes, it was a struggle, but I got it for them.

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.

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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
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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](#) 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.

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