

* 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.

JOEY

I'm strong. No matter what I've been through, it doesn't define me. My ex-partner who's the father of my three younger girls, was seven years younger than me. We started seeing each other over 10 years ago now. I had known of his family and that his father was perpetrated violence against him as a child. He was one of eight and his dad used to bash the absolute shit out of his mum and rape her. It was horrific. He bashed all the kids as well. He had lost family members to suicide. He had been through a really hard time, but it doesn't excuse any of his behaviour.

He was so short-fused. He had road rage. When we went to the shops, he would be so rude. And he'd go, "can I get a meal". I would say "please". Then he would say "I haven't fucking finished. Don't tell me how to speak".

“You can say what words you want. You can rip my T-shirt. I can go buy another T-shirt. But I can't just go and buy another pair of (reading) glasses from fucking Woolworths”.

Before he ever hit me, he would break everything in the house. He would throw anything that was near him including his own stuff. He just did not care. I had a laptop and he smashed that on the floor. He would smash TV sets. He would grab my phone off me and throw it across the room to break it. He broke his own phone a couple of times too. His go to was either break my phone or because I wear glasses, he would snatch my glasses off my face and break them. Snap them in half and this was incredibly hard because I needed them to work. I would just cry. Glasses are so expensive. I didn't have the money to just go and buy another pair of glasses. Once, I literally had just ordered a pair of frames online. They got delivered. I was meant to take them to the optometrists the next day and he

literally grabbed them off the desk and snapped them in half. They didn't even have lenses in them yet. After he broke those lenses I said, "You can say what words you want. You can rip my T-shirt. I can go buy another T-shirt, but I can't just go and buy another pair of (reading) glasses from fucking Woolworths". He's ripped up leather jackets, my wallets, my handbags. It was just unbelievable the amount of destruction he caused. So, that's how it started with him. If I had to add up how much money worth of stuff he'd actually broken, it would be well over \$20,000 worth of damages to property. I would have to quickly try and find a really good spot to hide laptops and phones, like there was a spot under the shoe rack in my walk-in wardrobe. Because he would start looking. He knew I would be hiding my devices. So, he would be searching. He would look behind the cushions in the couch. Sometimes I would quickly go and hide my phone in the mattress because he wouldn't have thought I would put it there.

The first time he actually slapped me in the face was when I was pregnant with our first child. Obviously, I didn't have anywhere else to go so I stayed there another 9 years. I used to say to myself, "I am okay. So many people were worse off than me. He didn't punch me or beat the shit out of me every single day". At least he never hit the kids. I knew there were women out there that were

getting punched, every day. I tried to play it down. He was quite strategic where he would hurt me. I would always have lots of bruises on my arms from where he'd grab me at the top, but these were not usually visible under my clothes.

The day after his nephew killed himself, we were all in massive shock, and we needed to visit his family. He had split my mouth open the night before. I had this big fat cut on the bottom middle of my lip, and I had these massive bruises on my arm. It was summer and very hot. My t-shirt didn't hide all the bruising. His grandmother saw the bruises on my arms, and she asked me about my lip. She said, "that better not have been my grandson". I said, "oh no". I was still trying to defend him even though they could see what the bruises were. They were grab marks. His whole family knew what he was doing to me.

The violence he used against me got worse the longer that we were together. Every day he just got worse and worse. In the beginning I did think he was going to change, he was a really good shit talker, and I wanted to believe him. For a period of our relationship, he worked away from home. So, for a month at a time he was away. I could cope with that. I enjoyed it when he was away. That's probably why the relationship lasted as long as it did, because a lot of the time he wasn't there. The whole time during our whole relationship he cheated on me. He would send me text messages when he was away – like he would send me a dick-pic, and he would write a caption on the photo saying, "I just had this up some slut's arse". So, there was that torment as well. He just really messed with my head. I was at home with five kids, our three girls were really little. My two eldest were both in the last years of highschool and weren't home very often. I was trying so hard to cope on my own as

“You fucking fat slut. No one's going to want you. You've got five kids”.

a mum. He always used to say, "you fucking fat slut. No one's going to want you. You've got all these kids". I started to believe that. So, my partner was doing that stuff behind my back, and on top of it all, I knew that as soon as he would come home he would treat me like shit. Early on, after he had cheated on me, I remember asking his mum, "do you think that he'll do it again?" She just said to me, "he's a male, of course he will". I never asked for her advice again. She was all about herself. As long as she had money, she was good, that's all that mattered. But she wouldn't share it around. That's the life she lived.

He didn't hit me all the time, but he'd grab me and throw me around. I've got photos of a ripped singlet on me. Red marks all over me. I used to try and actually take photos to document everything. I have about 15,000 photos on my phone which show everything he did. Say if he went outside to have a cigarette, I would quickly pull my phone out and just take a photo of what he had done. I have lots of photos of all the broken shit. I took photos of myself wearing the things that he had ripped. I don't know, just to have and remind myself that monster he really is. I feel like I always have to be one step ahead of him in terms of my three youngest girls and custody stuff. If he could take the girls off me and have them fulltime, he would. So, I tried to gather as much evidence I could to back myself.

He burnt me with a cigarette once. He was out at the front having a cigarette and I walked past him, and he put his cigarette out on my arm. I was like, "what the fuck", I walked back inside. He stood up and actually ran at me. He's six foot six, 150 kilos. He was at the gym all the time and he knew how to play footy, so he tackled me like I was a man. I just smacked down on the floor. Nearly took out

His grandmother saw the bruises on my arms, and she asked me about my lip. She said, "that better not have been my grandson".

my little girl, Kim, who was just a toddler at the time, because she was walking through the hallway. So, he just tackled me. I hit the ground and he landed on top of me. I hurt my foot really bad on that fall. It's still sore and injured today. I sometimes feel it clicking in and out. I used to say that to him, "you're just a bully. You're a real bully". As much as possible I used to just try and stay away from him. If he was sitting in the lounge room, then I wouldn't sit in the lounge room. I would just stay in my room on my phone. If I heard him coming, I would quickly hide my phone. I would have to try and think of places to put it that he wouldn't, because he'd start looking under the bed then. So, I would then hide it in a jacket pocket in my wardrobe.

He used to spit on me. That was probably one of the worst things. I could handle my clothes being ripped or whatever. But he would spit right on my face. It used to just gross me out so much and I would feel the most worthless. That was a thing he used to do a lot. He'd spit. I would just really try and avoid him. There was nothing really that would set him off. So, it wouldn't be like, "oh God I can see the signs". If he just wanted to be a bully at that moment, he would be a bully. Afterwards he'd be like "sorry" and whatever. But then he'd just be a dick again in the afternoon – "sorry", was just a word to me.

There were times where I would come home from the supermarket and had bags of shopping. If he was cranky, he would pick up all the groceries out of the bags and actually throw it around the house or throw the groceries at me. So, once he threw a bag of beans which burst open and beans just scattered everywhere. If there was a bowl on the bench, he'd pick that up and he would throw it at my feet. Bits of the broken bowl would cut my leg. There was one time that I was just so distraught and felt so worthless that I actually picked up a piece of the shattered ceramic bowl and I cut my arm open in two spots. I remember him saying to our girls, who were around six and eight, "look at your mum. She's trying to kill herself girls." That was not what I was doing, I was just so distraught. Another time, I was cooking a curry. He picked up the pot with boiling stew; he was aiming the pot at for me and then he hurled it. The stew went all over me and all over the place. There was just food everywhere. I've got little scars on my legs from burns and times he had thrown a mug or a bowl, and it had bounced up off the floor and nicked me. There was one particular time he actually threw a full unopened can at me. It hit the back of my head, to the left, behind my ear, on that sort of high bit of bone behind your ear. I have a photo where you can see the cut in the back of my head, and I'm all bruised at the back of my ear. I had taken a photo a couple of days later and it is really clear how big the injury was. I do remember being in those moments and thinking "I just want to die. I just want to die. I just want this to stop". I was so restricted, and I didn't have the means at that point in time to get out. Getting out felt like a really far away option. I thought I was going to be stuck in it forever. I do remember just thinking, "I hope I die". He worked in construction, and it is a physically dangerous job and there were so many times I'd think, "oh my fucking God, I hope he has an accident at work today and dies".

"You know that that's what he does, so why are you still there?"

I've got amazing friends and we really support each other. But sometimes when I spoke to some of my friends about him and all the horrible stuff he was doing, they got sick of hearing my story, especially because I didn't leave. I felt judged and one of my friends said to me once "you know that that's what he does, so why are you still there?" I felt a lot of shame.

The first thing that people do say is, "oh well, why didn't you just leave?" So, I stopped talking to them and telling them when something happened, because I didn't want to feel judged again. I would just say, "yes everything is great. Everything's fine". When on the inside I was screaming. I had one really good friend that I could trust and tell her everything. She would never say, "you've got to leave". She would just listen to me. If I needed anything she was there for me and the kids. I knew I could trust her and count on her if I needed to.

“Please just leave me alone. Just leave me alone. Please just let me go to sleep”.

There was another time that he'd woken me up at two in the morning and he wanted me to sleep with him. I said “no, what are you talking about? You've just woken me up. It's two in the morning. That doesn't work for me”. Then he just lost his shit, and he stood up and he tipped me off the mattress and called me a “fucking slut”. I said “just go back to sleep. It's two o'clock in the morning, stop yelling. Stop yelling”. I was on the ground because he had literally tipped me

off the bed. I knew I had to find my phone to hide it, because every time he was that angry he would break my phone. So, I grabbed my pillow, and I just went down to the living room to sleep on the couch. I thought he would leave me alone. But no, he followed me. I managed to find my phone and started audio recording and slid the phone into the pillow slip so he couldn't find it. So, I have an audio recording of him yelling that night “you're a fucking slut”. I've only ever listened to the recording once before. I could just hear myself saying to him, “please just leave me alone. Just leave me alone. Please just let me go to sleep” over and over again. All the while he kept yelling “you fucking slut”. You can really hear the aggression in his voice.

He had picked up Lilly's electric guitar. Lilly is not his daughter, she's my eldest from my previous marriage. Lilly had bought an electric guitar with her savings. So, he had picked up her guitar and he smashed that right in front of me. That really hurt. After he destroyed the guitar, he then picked up my pillow, which is pretty firm and heavy, and he whacked me over the head with it.

He did that quite a lot. He was very predictable. He did the same thing over and over again. He would get this look in his eyes as well. In that moment of aggression, he would just get this look in his eyes like “I could kill you” his eyes would go really big. It was really, really scary. There was one time I actually thought “this is it, this is the moment that I'm going to die”. We were in the hallway in between the lounge room and my girls' rooms. He grabbed me and put me in a chokehold, and I actually thought “this is it”. It was the weirdest feeling I've ever experienced. If I can describe it in anyway it would be like an out of body experience. I actually felt like I was watching myself from outside of myself. I was almost at the point of passing out. He eventually let go and I didn't pass out, but it was damn close. It actually took me a little bit to get my bearings and actually get up off the floor. That was probably one of the scariest moments.

Not long after that, we were going to take our youngest girls to the local skate park because we had got them scooters for Christmas. As we were driving, he says to me “did you bring lunch?” I didn't I thought we would just get lunch out. I wasn't driving, he was driving. He started yelling “you fucking idiot”. He pushed down the button of my window, the passenger side, and he snatched the glasses off my face and threw my glasses out of the car. I screamed and begged him to pull over. He did, and then I was trying to find these glasses. Luckily, they weren't broken because they had landed in the sand. He just kept say it was all my fault because I forgot to make and bring him lunch. Then he turned us around and drove us home saying there was “no point in going to the skate park now”.

I called the Police a few times. The first time had gone out the front and gone around the side of the unit block to make the call. The neighbours were watching from other balconies. Not long after I made the call to the Police he found me outside and I started yelling “just get away from me, just get away from me”. He was yelling, “shut your fucking mouth, that's right, you fucking have to yell so everyone hears you. Shut your fucking mouth”. He actually open-hand-slapped me really hard in the mouth and

“Do you want us to call the ambulance”? They were like, “are you sure? You don't look too great”.

split my lip open. I was wearing this white top and I had just blood all over it. I said, “oh fuck you, you know what, I’ve already called the Police”. Not too long after, the Police rocked up and they arrested him. The Police were helpful. It would have looked really bad, there was just blood all over me. They asked me, “do you want us to call the ambulance?” I said, “no, no, no, it’s all good, I don’t need an ambulance”. I just didn’t want any fuss. They were like, “are you sure? You don’t look too great”.

He was locked up over the weekend for that and charged with grievous bodily harm. His parents picked him up from the station, because he wasn’t allowed back in the house. His mum rang me, asking if she could collect some of his things. I said, “no, you’re not coming into my house. I’ll drop them off at the Police station”. She was really angry with me. She didn’t ask me if I was okay or anything like that. So, I just bagged up his clothes, or whatever he wanted, and dropped it off at the Police station so that I didn’t have to see him or his parents.

But he did eventually move back in with me. The day I left him, I was getting ready to leave for work. I had to be at work in 15 minutes. He refused to give me the car keys. He said, “you can fucking walk to work. You’re not taking the car”. I was crying and he started yelling and screaming. He ripped my work shirt off me. I was standing in the lounge room, and he went over to the kitchen. He picked up the garbage bin one of those deep plastic ones and he launched the garbage bin from the kitchen at me and it hit me. There was roast meat, fat and oil all over me and all over the living room. I

“okay calm down because they’re going to ask what’s wrong. And you don’t want to, telling them this. Calm down, you’ve got to get your shit together”.

remember trying to clean myself up and changing my work shirt. I had to walk really fast to get to work and I was trying to calm myself down. I hadn’t really spoken about his behaviour to anybody at work either. So, the whole walk there I was like, “okay calm down because they’re going to ask what’s wrong. And you don’t want to, telling them this. Calm down, you’ve got to get your shit together”. As soon as I got to work, and I just burst into tears. My colleagues rushed over and said “what’s going on?” The HR person was there and I told her. She said to me “look you can’t work. You can’t be here like this. You need to look after yourself”. She was really shocked and surprised. I worked hard to hide it so well in terms of my bubbly nature at work. I’m always fun and laughing and confident. She said that they were here to support me if I needed anything. My CEO was the same. So, I actually went to a friend’s house that night because I didn’t want to go back home. She

picked me up from work and took me to her house so I could just be there and not have to go home after all that just went down. The hardest thing was knowing that my girls were still at home with him. He never hurt them directly. He never laid a hand on them at all. But I knew all the stories of exes or partners want to get back at their partner by hurting their kids. I was terrified. I got the Police involved again and he was arrested, charged and an Intervention Order was issued by the Court to prevent him from coming near me and the house. So that was it for me.

Even though I’ve now got him out of my life in terms of being in a relationship, he still gives me grief with the child support money. He really uses it against me. He knows what he has to pay me in terms of child support. It’s a private agreement that he just transfers a certain amount to me each week. But if I don’t play the game well or I don’t speak to him “properly” on the phone, he will not pay me. So, he would make me go through Child Support Services even though it takes so long. He does that every God damn time. He’ll say, “You’re speaking to me rudely, go through Child Support. You’re not getting your money this week”. A couple of weeks ago he said he wasn’t going to pay child support for a few weeks. He said, “you’ll get it when I’m ready”. Then he laughed and said “Ha ha,

you've got no money. I've got money". I said, "is that really funny? Now your children have no money". He has used this as a weapon against me. It been hard work. I've had to block him at work on the phone here. Because he'd ring up and ask if I was there. The reception staff would say, "I'm sorry she can't come to the phone, I don't know where she is". Then he would say "well you better fucking find her". So, I have staff who I am managing who are copping this abuse from him. That has been so embarrassing for me. My workplace overall has been amazing. They actually paid for the counselling sessions for me. If I needed time off, they would give this to me.

I have very minimal contact with him now. The last thing I want to do is be around him. Just being around him makes me so uncomfortable. I could feel myself start to shake. But he wanted to come to my youngest girl's school assembly awards night. He was running late, and he called me and said, "I'm on my way". My daughter was sitting next to me at the table and then I saw him walk in. My daughter ran up and gave her dad the biggest hug. All people were watching. I had people come up to me after going, "oh my God it was so sweet. I had tears in my eyes". I thought, "Fuck, if only you knew what an ogre he can be". Not to his children, because he used them to put on a façade. He's very egotistical. He had to be the biggest person there. He had to be the best at everything. Then he sat down at the table and my daughter was in the middle of us. I could just feel him staring at me. He was looking straight at me. I had to get up and go for a walk outside. I just had to get away from him. I walked back in to see my daughter pick up quite a few different awards. I was so proud of her. But just because he was there, I wanted to shed my skin after that night. He also took my youngest daughters back to his place for four weeks. In that whole time, he was telling me that I wasn't getting them back. Then all of a sudden, I was allowed to have them back. I try not to let him just have the power over me anymore. I just hang up. I blocked his number. I hang up.

“But just because he was there, I wanted to shed my skin after that night”.

He has made threats. It wasn't that long ago he said over the phone, "don't forget, I know where your kids live". That got me to the core. You can say whatever you want to me or about me, do whatever, but don't attack or threaten my kids. Then in the next breath, he said "you know I'd never do anything to your kids". I hung up and put my audio recording app on my phone. Then he would ring back, and I would answer, "what did you say about my kids?" He would say the same

threats again. Then I let him know "thank you, I'm recording this". He would start yelling "oh, you fucking cunt, you fucking little fat slut". When you're dealing with somebody like that in your life, and even if they're not in your life anymore, I have to do everything I can to protect myself. Because he'll try. One day he might be nice as pie. The next day he could be telling me that the girls want to live with him and when they come up to his house they're not coming home.

He was physically much bigger than me. I'm quite short. But there were many moments where, I stood up and physically defended myself. That would always make him angrier, but I was going to get whatever I was going to get anyway. It wasn't like he was going to stop. So now, I'm not really scared of anybody. I don't care what people think. I'm a very kind person and I look after my people. I don't go out to cause trouble, but I'm like, "oh well, if you're not six foot and 150 kilos, I'm not scared of you", because I've had that running at me plenty of times.

Last year I met this new guy. We got along really well, and we were together for almost a year. I thought I found the love of my life and the one I was going to be with forever. He made me feel that way and he even told me that. Then out of the blue, he went back to his cheating ex-girlfriend. So, that put me in a really bad head space. I was more heartbroken than I felt with the perpetrator. Because the perpetrator showed me the person that he was. So, when he would hurt me physically, mentally and emotionally, I expected that from him because that's who he was. But when I got burnt by my current boyfriend – he took me by surprise by saying "I think, I've still got feelings for my ex. Sorry, can't be with you". I had worked so hard on my self-worth and everything and then this

happened. It just took me back to that place of worthlessness. A good friend of mine who was also going through a breakup said “You know what Joey, no one is taking our power anymore. It is their loss if they don’t want us in their lives. It is their loss”. So, her support has meant a lot.

I work pretty hard, and I probably do more online shopping than I should. When I go out and wear a nice jacket, and people say, “oh, you look amazing, you look great”. I feel great. That’s really important to me. We all bloody deserve to feel good. I also started getting my ears pierced. I was just feeling so much pain on the inside and was like, “I want to do something for myself, and I think that looks really cool”. Even the older people at work say, “oh wow, look at your earrings”. I had a 50-year-old bloke say to me, “it’s unique, I love it”. I got my nose pierced as well. I was like, “you know what, no one’s going to tell me what I can and can’t do. This is my body. If I want a nose piercing, I’m going to have one. No one’s going to tell me what to do”.

“You know what, no one’s going to tell me what I can and can't do. This is my body. If I want a nose piercing, I’m going to have one. No one’s going to tell me what to do”.

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](#) 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: © 2022 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.
