

* 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.

DOROTHY

I hope that by sharing my story, it helps to make the path that someone else is on a little easier. I wouldn't want someone to walk on the path that I have for the last ten years. I hope that we grow as a community and we don't keep repeating these patterns of violence over and over. I don't feel like I fit in the normal box of domestic violence.

We met in Australia while he was on a six-month contract with a high security government entity. He was a nice guy. He was charming and witty and funny and so kind and sweet. I have learned that nice guys are what we are taught to look for, but they are problematic. Actually, it's good men that we should look to date.

My experiences weren't what we typically think of as, the 1970s - 1980s version where someone comes home drunk and hits their wife and they have a bruised face and they're sorry the next day. The perpetrator's "mental health problems" masked his abuse and made it fuzzy and confusing for me. His "mental health problems" have also made it incredibly difficult for me to get assistance and to be heard. He was claiming to have "anxiety", "depression" and "PTSD". The perpetrator presented so well but was a narcissist, and a psychopath with violent tendencies who later faked a violent sleep disorder. I've had to really educate myself so that I could advocate for myself.

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Frustratingly, I continue to find that the people that I'm advocating to don't have the same level of education and understanding that I do about domestic violence from a perpetrator with those particular mental health issues. A turning point for me was when a DV worker explained to me that "some men are alcoholics. Some men hit their wives. Some alcoholics hit their wives. But they don't all do it". For too long, I stayed because I didn't want to leave someone who was sick. It nearly cost me my life and the lives of my children.

I moved from Australia to be with him in Canada. We had been married for 6 months, and I was about 10 weeks pregnant with twins. Around this time, he took me to a friend's party in Montreal. He didn't have a lot of friends, but he had one friend from his early uni days, so he had known them for about 20 years. I knew I was showing, but we were both so happy to be pregnant. I stood next to him at the party and

people were coming up and saying, "hey". People looked at me curiously, so I introduced myself, "oh, Hi, I'm Dorothy" and then he said, "she's from Australia". The first couple of times he said it, I thought, he's really excited that I'm Australian, or he's pre-empting the fact they're going to notice my accent. Then I realised that he was literally introducing me to his oldest friends as, "This is Dorothy, she's from Australia". He made me sound like I was a tourist or someone that he met at a backpackers. So, I pulled him aside and I said, "hey, I don't think you mean this but they're wondering who I am, not

what my name is. They're curious about me here with you and you're introducing me as "Dorothy from Australia". Another way to introduce me would be, "hey, this is Dorothy. She's my new wife. We're really excited because we are about to have a baby". He said, "I can't do that". I started to get a little bit tetchy, "Why can't you?" He said, "they won't understand that I've married you". I'm like, "I think they'll get it. They seem like intelligent people. I think they're going to understand how marriage works" and laughed. And he said, "no, they won't accept that. I've known these people most of my life". I was so confused. Then he said, "they've never seen me with a fat person before. They've only ever seen me with really cute blondes. They won't understand it". I said, "I'm not fat, I'm pregnant". He replied, "well, you're fat compared to all my previous partners and you're too tall". So, I said, "okay, so I'm too tall and too fat to be your pregnant wife with these people at this party. Okay, I'm going to go home now. I hope you enjoy the party". I was really shocked. I couldn't comprehend that this person who absolutely adored me, who I absolutely adored, had said this to me. I still find it really difficult that he felt that that was a reasonable thing to say but its how the narcissism works. It is all part of the abuse.

It was snowballing quite quickly. I had already paid all this money for the Canadian Visa, and I had let my townhouse in Australia go. I was increasingly pregnant. For so many reasons it just wasn't possible to go home at that time. So, there I was in a foreign country, pregnant and my adoring husband has just said the most awful thing to me at a party. At the time, I just thought my husband was a bit of an idiot. I think I blamed his friends more than him. I was thinking, "well, those people are not being accepting of me and that is why he did what he did". Rather than seeing that he was choosing to do that and they would have been fine.

In the beginning, one of the first things I noticed was that he was very in particular about me walking on the footpath or going up flights of stairs, to the point it really annoyed me. So, as we walked, he would say to me, "oh, there's a crack there. Be careful. Oh, it's uneven here. Look out. Oh, there's grass growing". I would reply, "Yes, I have walked on a footpath before. Please stop that. It's annoying". He would always insist on walking on the roadside. He would carry on if there was any

water across a footpath or a puddle. I would say "can you stop? That is chivalrous but it's annoying. I've got this". He would say, "you're very precious to me. And I would hate for you to have an accident while walking". He never backed down on that. So, I just learned to accept that he's going to keep doing it. I thought he was well intentioned. But now, I don't think it was well intentioned, I think it was about control. Me pushing back made no difference to his behaviour.

If he said, "you need to do...", "you'll have to...", "your children need...". Then he would almost always be extremely violent that night. I always knew it was coming. It was just a shift from seeing himself as part of the group to being separate to the group.

He actually got another contract job back with the high security group, so we relocated to Melbourne. By the time we moved home we had my 13-year-old daughter Alice from a previous marriage, and we had welcomed twin boys, James and Joshua. Family life was busy and the move back was intended to make life easier. It was when we were in Melbourne that I noticed that the perpetrator would always use the pronoun "ours". It almost felt strange how he referred to everything as "ours", "our children", "our dinner", "our time to watch TV together". Things that should have been mine or his were "ours". I would never say to him, "my children" ever. It always had to be "our children". He was very adamant about that from beginning. I began to notice a pattern that if he said, "you need to do...",

“you’ll have to...”, “your children need...”. Then he would almost always be extremely violent that night. I always knew it was coming. It was just a shift from seeing himself as part of the group to being separate to the group. So, I would say, “okay, it’s time for Mummy and Daddy’s little ones to go to bed” or, “hey, do you want to go and say goodnight to *our* babies now?” It felt almost forced. I would use the collective pronouns to see if I could pull him back and make him aware that he was part of the group.

I didn’t find that worked, often it really didn’t seem to have much impact. Once he was in that frame of mind, he was in it. So I made adjustments for his moods. I would not bring up things that might upset him, I wouldn’t mention an invitation to a party or that I’d gone to the grocery store that day or interactions with others. His physical abuse occurred at night. Some nights I would wake up to him assaulting me. In the morning he said he didn’t do it and said he was asleep throughout. We sought medical help and went to sleep clinics, but nothing was moving ahead and he denied any wrong doing, while I experienced the abuse at night.

The day I left him, we had all gone on a holiday to a hotel resort on the Mornington Peninsular. The holiday was his idea. He thought that it was going to repair the marriage and give us family time. In the lead up to this holiday, I had actually been speaking with a couple of Domestic Violence workers, they were clear that I was in a dangerous situation, but I wasn’t going to be able to leave at that point. We had developed a safety plan. I had also let my sister know some of what he had been doing to us. My sister begged me not to go on this holiday, she felt like that was a really bad idea. Just before we left, he had a huge meltdown for hours. He was aware that I must have asked my sister to come over, but I had used a code word from our safety plan and there was no evidence I had asked directly. So, he locked himself in the bedroom and he wouldn’t come out and he kept yelling “your sister needs to leave”. All his pronouns were, “your this”, and “your that”. He eventually calmed down and became very tired. He finally agreed to go on the holiday and he went and sat in the car. But he didn’t help

“I felt him climb back into the bed and move into his gargoyle mode again, staring over me. He just wouldn’t move. I tried going to sleep on the sofa. He came out and ‘gargoyled’ over the top of me there. He did this all night. I’d had almost no sleep”.

with the packing or anything. He refused to bring his phone and he said, “your phone is our phone, and we are going to share it”. As soon as we arrived at the resort hotel, it all went downhill. We hadn’t been sharing the same bedroom at home due to his night-time use of violence. So, when I walked into the hotel suite, it dawned on me, we’re going to be sharing the same space. That’s not good. That night I went to sleep by myself because he was watching TV. The children were all in bunk beds in the other room. I woke up in the middle of the night to find him sitting almost where the gap between two pillows would normally be. He was sitting right in the middle of the bedhead leaning over me, staring down at me sleeping like he was a weird gargoyle in the bed. I looked at him and I said, “what’s going on?” He’s like, “I’m watching you sleep”. I said, “Well, I’d rather didn’t do that. Could you not do that?” And he said, “I’m going to watch you sleep”. I said, “I don’t really want you to. Are you not tired?” I then tried sitting up and he said, “just stay there”. He was over the top of me so much, I really couldn’t get up even though I was trying. I said, “just stop. That can’t be comfortable”. I thought to myself – “he has to move eventually”. But he did not move. Eventually, I could hear that my little ones had woken up and I said, “do you want to get them?” He said, “no”. I tried to crack a

joke and went, “you don’t want to go and get *our* sweet little babies?” He kept refusing.

I managed to roll down out of and away from the bed and I went to check on the children. I took a really long time doing this as I knew what lay ahead for me. When I came back he was still sitting in the same position. I said, “I want to go back to bed. Do you feel like you could move yet? It’s not going to be comfortable for me to go back to sleep with you sitting there like that”. He finally said “fine”, and he went to the bathroom. I laid back down in the bed and I was barely sleeping when I felt him climb back into the bed and move into his ‘gargoyle’ mode again, staring over me. He just wouldn’t move. I tried going to sleep on the sofa. He came out and ‘gargoyled’ over the top of me there. He did this all night. I’d had almost no sleep. Every time I woke up, he was over the top of me, I was waiting for him to strangle me as he had done previously.

The next day he was really agitated too because he hadn’t slept much either. He was hiding things and moving things around the hotel room. He struggled to sit at the table for breakfast, he kept getting up and down, he was a bit aggressive with the children around getting dressed and started complaining about their outfits. He actually did this every time we were going to go somewhere. He would line me and my kids up and he would inspect everybody to make sure that we looked appropriate to go outside. He checked that my jean pockets were in straight. That our shoelaces were tied neatly, that our hair was done. Everyone had to have brushed their teeth. Everyone had cleaned their ears. Everybody needed to be as perfected as possible just to walk out the door. I’m not big on having my hair perfectly done. I would just put it in a ponytail. He would often let me know that being married to me was disappointing because I wouldn’t finish myself before we went places. He would say to me, “you are embarrassing”.

So, as we were finally leaving the hotel room after inspecting everyone, he started blowing up some arm floaties for our boys. They were only toddlers. He said he wanted us all to go swimming in the ocean at the beach nearby. I actually brought floaties so that the boys could play in the hotel pool with me. I said to him, “there’s only one of us who can swim in the ocean and it’s you and you can’t put toddlers in \$5 floaties in the ocean, that’s not going to work. Someone will get hurt. We can’t do that”. He lost it.

“It was like I was dealing with an adult male toddler. But I also had to be careful not to be condescending.”

He raised his voice and started screaming and yelling, he was really agitated. He took the car keys and he took the hotel keys. I kept trying to say to him “we can go to the beach and but it’s not safe to put the little ones in the ocean in floaties because they are only toddlers. But we could go to the hotel pool which has a baby pool. Which choice, you decide?” It was like I was dealing with an adult male toddler. But I also had to be careful not to be condescending. So, I said, “I’m open to doing whatever you want to do. I am really happy for this to be your holiday. We can do whatever you want to do. I just, I have concerns about our children’s safety and so, I just want to pick the safest path forward”. His mood really didn’t improve but finally he relented and said, “okay,

we’ll just take the sand toys then and we’ll go to the beach”. I was relieved and I grabbed the littles, with my daughter who was helping them out the door. We started walking through the resort towards the exit and on the way, we passed the hotel pool. There was no one else in the pool, so I said, “hey, the pool looks really nice. We could play here when we get back, play here this afternoon”. I wanted to demonstrate to him that I understood that that was important to him that we would come back and do it. Then he said, “hang on, I forgot something, stay here.” and he ran back to the room. He left us standing there and I was trying to entertain the kids. Of course, he came back carrying the floaties.

I thought this meant he was happy to just play with us in the hotel pool, but he insisted “no, we’re going to the beach”. I said, “no, not with the floaties, our babies will drown. We can’t do this. Look, how about we just stay here, we’re here now and there’s a baby pool”. Then he said, “move forward and go through that gate”. His whole tone had changed. He was really aggressive, and we were in a public space. He had never been aggressive in a public space before. I realised I was in real trouble here because he had stopped even caring about his image management and what others thought of him. He shuffled us through the hotel gate. So now we were on the street, effectively, we’re at the base of the hotel with the kids being marched to the beach. It was really bad. He said, “you are going to walk over there. You can’t walk with us”. I said, “I think we can walk as a family”. He’s said, “you’re not in the family. You can’t walk with us. I’m taking *my* children to the beach”. I knew exactly what the change in the pronouns meant. I kept saying “it isn’t safe it, isn’t safe to put twin toddlers in the ocean wearing just floaties”. The boys were so tiny.

“You are going to walk over there. You can’t walk with us...you’re not in the family. You can’t walk with us. I’m taking *my* children to the beach”.

I said, “I’m going to help everyone cross the road. Okay, whose hand can Mummy have?” He shouted “get over there. You are not walking with us”. He ordered me to walk about five to six meters away from him. He stood between me and the boys and he tried to scoop them up and cross the road and my daughter, Alice was holding James’s hand and she was looking at me like, “do I cross the road? Do I stay with Mum? Do I stay with the James?” Alice was looking really worried. So, I said to her, “it’s okay. I’ve got this”.

The perpetrator kept saying “you disgust me! I can’t believe that I’ve married you”. I said, “if the lifeguards see babies in floaties in the ocean, they’re going to get angry, they’re not going to allow that”. He said, “I’m not going to get into trouble. These are *my* children”. So, we kept walking through the streets, every so often, he would stop and say to me, “stand here” and then he would move forward, and he said that I wasn’t allowed to move. The boys were screaming “Mummy”, and my daughter didn’t know where to stand. We finally got down to the beach and I tried to distract the boys by playing with the sand. He said, “you’re not allowed to touch the floaties”. I said, “the boys don’t understand that. Can I watch them, and you can go for a swim?” But he wasn’t having that.

My daughter Alice and I had a phrase we used from the time that I divorced her dad, where she would get quite concerned about all the changes. My ex-husband, Tim and I had a very amicable divorce. But I would always say to Alice, “I’ve got this, darling” and anytime I said to her, “I’ve got this”, she would go with that, “Mum’s got this, I don’t need to worry”. So, throughout this ordeal from the hotel to the beach, I had said to Alice a couple of times, “I’ve got this darling, I’ve got this”. She looked at me like, “I don’t think you’ve got anything”. But I kept reassuring her, “I’ve got this darling”.

I then turned to him, the perpetrator, and said, “I feel sick. I need to go to the bathroom. I think I need to vomit. And I’ve got an upset tummy, I think I’ve probably got diarrhoea”. He said, “well, you can shit yourself on the beach. I’m not giving you the keys to that apartment”. I said, “no, I’m unwell. This morning has been really stressful. I’m going to need to go to the bathroom”. He just responded, “again, I don’t care. You’re not with us, it doesn’t matter what happens to you”. I begged for the hotel key, and I carried on a bit, and I got a bit annoying until he said, “yes, fine whatever and threw the key at me”. It was really difficult, but I had to leave the three children on the beach to execute a plan. I signaled to Alice to hang out with them. I noticed there was a lifeguard nearby which was reassuring, and I could see the perpetrator had got involved in playing in the sand with the kids. But I knew I didn’t have long before he would try to put my babies in the ocean.

“It’s gone poorly, I need to exit. If I haven’t called you in 45 minutes and I’m free, thinking freely, letting you know that I’m safe, then you will know that I’m not safe...I need you to call the Police”.

I left the beach. I had intentionally put my phone into my pocket just as we left the hotel, so on the way back to the hotel I called my sister and I said to her, “it’s gone poorly, I need to exit. If I haven’t called you in 45 minutes and I’m free, thinking freely, letting you know that I’m safe, then you will know that I’m not safe. This is our room number, I need you to call the Police and send them either to the beach in the front of the hotel or to the hotel room number...45 minutes and I have to be out of here”. My sister was beside herself. I explained that I knew that if we all ended up back into the hotel room, he would kill me. The distance was too much today, the language, was too much. He would kill me. He had been so close to it before. I knew what was coming. My sister begged me “don’t go into the hotel room”. I said, “I’m going to try and get a few things”. I went back up to the hotel room, I grabbed the hidden car key and some of my daughter’s things. I also thought, “well, I can’t take the little kids things, he’s going to notice that”. I also realised I couldn’t take any of my things because he

would notice that too. My daughter had a phone and some other stuff, and I took it down to the car and hid it under the seats in the car. I had to check the car because previously the perpetrator would damage it intentionally to punish me for using it. So, I knew I needed to check the car to make sure he hadn’t done anything to it. I put the spare key in the front under the seat where I could get it as long as I could get into the car. I thought that I might need to lock myself in. After checking the car, I went back to the beach. I was just hoping that my kids were all still okay. Alice came running up to me and he said, “he’s not okay, Mum, he’s not okay. I think he’s going to hurt you”. I said to Alice, “I’ve got this. But whatever I ask you to do for the next little while, I need you to not be 13 years old about. Okay? I’ve got this but you need to do whatever I say even if it doesn’t feel like a good idea at the time. I’m just going to need you to do whatever I say”. Alice knew that we were all in trouble. She was scared. So, she asked me, “you got this?” I’m repeated, “I’ve got this! Do what I say even if it’s ridiculous, you need to go back over to him. Can you just look a little bit disappointed as you go back?” Alice agreed and she walked over to the perpetrator looking disappointed. I also walked up to the perpetrator and said, “I’m so sorry. I’ve behaved really badly this morning. I think it’s because I can’t swim. And the water stuff makes me really anxious. And I think my behaviour this morning is just out of anxiety and I’m really sorry”. He said, “are you? Are you actually sorry for what you’ve done?” I said, “yes, I am. I feel better now that I’ve gone to the bathroom and I’ve calmed down. I think I was just really anxious, I’ve had an anxious tummy” and so I was strategically blaming it on anxiety. He said, “well, what are you sorry for?” And I replied, “I’m really sorry for everything. I’m sorry for how I’ve spoken to you. And I’m really sorry for my approach and I’m really sorry for not trusting that you already knew everything that you would need to know. You’re really capable and your decisions for our family are the best decisions”. He responded with, “yes, they are. I’m the head of the household”. I said, “yes, and I think there’s a reason for that, right? Because I get really anxious and then I behave like that and I’m so sorry”. He said, “okay, well, your daughter needs to apologise to me too”. I said “does she? What’s she done that’s disappointing? What’s she done?” He said, “she’s just, she hasn’t trusted me. She hasn’t taken me seriously. She’s fucking treated me really poorly”. I said, “okay, do you want me to have that chat with her?” He said, “yes, you make her say sorry to me”. I

“He’s not okay, Mum, he’s not okay. I think he’s going to hurt you”.

laughed it off like, this might be hard to do. I walked over to Alice, my back was to the perpetrator so that I could pull faces at my daughter. I said to Alice, “your behaviour today has been really disappointing”, while my facial expression was saying to her “no, no, it hasn’t been”. For a moment Alice looked at me really horrified. So, I winked at her. And then she softened slightly and then immediately went back to being really horrified and I just still remember thinking, “God, did the perpetrator see that? Did he see the subtle change, that dip in her face?”

I continued saying to Alice, “Your behaviour today has not been appropriate. My behaviour hasn’t been either. I’ve had to apologise”. My daughters’ face started to change, like “what”? So, I said, “listen, I’ve got this, but you need to go down there and apologise”.

“Follow me and make it look like we’re going to the store”. We left the beach in the direction of the shops but the second we crossed the road, we went straight back to the hotel.

Alice said, “oh, yes, oh, yes”. The perpetrator was standing there so smug and pleased with this apology that he was going to get from her. Alice went over to him and said, “I’m so sorry. I realise that Mum’s already been a problem today and then I’ve really added to that. I should have been a better role model and a better big sister, and I should have had more respect for you. I’m really sorry”. Alice banged on for a bit with this nonsense. I said, “do you know what? I think we need to try and fix this as a family. How about if I go back to the shops and get everyone a bite to eat. I want to take care of you how you should be taken care of?” The perpetrator said “yes, I’m sick of looking after them anyway, I’m going to go and have a swim”.

So, I said, “okay, well, can I take our kids with me to go get some chips? He said, “yes, go on, you go and look after them for a while, you haven’t done anything this morning”. So, I picked up James and Alice picked up Josh.

I said to Alice, “follow me and make it look like we’re going to the store”. We left the beach in the direction of the shops but the second we crossed the road, we went straight back to the hotel. Alice pleaded with me, “Mum, I don’t think we should go back to the hotel. I really don’t think we should go back to the hotel”. I just kept saying, “I’ve got this”. We had to enter into the hotel complex to get to the car. Once we were all safely in the car, I locked the internal doors. I knew even if he followed us or something, we had a bit of distance. I reversed out of the car park and then drove away, I couldn’t stop. Alice said “I’ve never seen you look scared before, Mum”. I just said over and over again, “I’ve got this darling, I’ve got this. We’re going to have a hard day. I just need you to know that I’ve got this. And so, I’m really sorry for the phone calls that you’re about to hear”.

I called my sister and said, “I’m okay”. She said, “you’re at 43 minutes”. I said “I’m so sorry. It took a while”. She said, “it took so long”. I said, “I’ll explain when I get there. Can you meet me at the Police station? I’m going to head back to Melbourne now and we are going to the Police station, can you meet me there?” She agreed, and we were about an hour away by that point. I said, “everyone’s fine. We’re in the car, we’re fine”. I hung up and I called the perpetrator’s parents and said, “I’ve just left him, he doesn’t know yet. It was going to end badly. I think he’s going to be okay but he is at a hotel room on his own. I’m going to do what I can, but I’m headed to a Police station now”. His mum said to me “that’s fine. You do whatever you need to do to stay safe. You guys do whatever you need to do”. I then called his brother and

“That’s fine. You do whatever you need to do to stay safe. You guys do whatever you need to do”.

explained the same thing. His brother said, “do you think he’ll commit suicide in the room?” I said, “let’s hope not, right?” But at the same time, I was thinking “if he does, he does”. I felt like someone was going to die in that hotel room and if that was him on his own versus us, then so be it. I rang the hotel and said, “I’ll have to mail our room key back to you. My husband is likely to come in and ask for a second key. Would that be okay? Because when we checked in, they tried to give us two keys, but he insisted on only having one. So, I said, “would it be okay to give him the second key?” The reception staff were okay with this. I said, “okay and we’re due to check out tomorrow, so if he doesn’t check out in the morning, don’t go to the room. If he doesn’t check out in the morning, could you just phone the Police and do a wellness check on the room? Don’t go yourself”. That’s when the reception staff asked me, “why is that?” And I said, “My kids and I are safe, but we are driving to the Police station now. He’s unaware but he may get unhappy once he’s in the room and realised we have left”. She said, “well, yes, for sure. If he doesn’t check out in the morning, I’ll do that, then. I’ll leave a note”. I think the receptionist was shocked. She probably wasn’t expecting that phone call, “hey, he may commit suicide in your room tonight”. I probably didn’t need to do all of that. But it was sitting in my head that this might be how this plays out. I then called Alice’s dad, Tim, because he knew that things were not working out with the perpetrator but he didn’t know quite how bad it had been for me. So, I told Tim, “I just left him. I’m fine and our daughter is with me”, and Alice yelled out, “hey, Dad”. Tim said, “Hey Al” and he says, “I’ve got this, I will come to the Police station, and I can meet you there”. My daughter laughs because Tim said, “I’ve got this”. Alice joked, “dad, you never have anything. Mum’s always the one who has everything”. Which is kind of true. Tim said, “yes but I think your mum might need me to have this one right now. Will I meet you?” I then called the Police and said, “I’ve left him. I’m driving in. I’ll be there in about an hour. What do I need to do to get there?” The Police told me not to go back to my home but to go straight to the Police station. When we arrived at the station, I took about, 15, 20 minutes for me to gather my thoughts. My daughter, said, “oh, Mum, all my stuff”. I said, “your stuff’s under the car seat, honey”. Alice pulled it all out and she was like, so amazed, I said “you’re all good. You’ve got your stuff”.

By this time my sister and Tim had arrived at the Police Station and we all went in together. The Police called the Domestic Violence service I had been seeing the week before the holiday. They actually spoke with Alinta, one of the workers I had met with, it was just a coincidence. Alinta said, “oh, something’s gone really wrong because she wasn’t in a situation where she could leave him last week. Something’s gone really, really wrong”. The Police asked me if I wanted to go to a refuge. But I remember Alinta telling me that I didn’t want to go to a refuge, that it would be an awful environment

“The smartest thing I did was, I gathered up all the perpetrator’s things and I had put them in a backpack near the front door”.

with fleas and lice. I realised that I had a bit of a window in time because I knew the perpetrator had no car and he would probably need to get public transport or a very expensive cab ride to get home and that either way we had a couple of hours. I decided we could get a few things from the house because I had nothing. The Police agreed because we had a bit of time “you can go to the house whenever - you’re fine on your own”. My sister arranged for me to stay with one of her best friends where the perpetrator wouldn’t know the address. I left my kids with her while Tim and I went back to the house.

I knew Tim was going to be zero protection if the perpetrator showed up, but it was so good to have him there with me. Unfortunately, all the things I needed to grab, were still at the hotel. You take your essentials on holiday, your hairbrush, shampoo and conditioner and your makeup and your bag and all your things. So, I didn’t have anything. I had zero. I had very few clothes and shoes left. I didn’t really have much of anything. So, I gathered up what I could. I had already put a suitcase at my sister’s place with a few of the kids clothes in it that he wouldn’t notice they missing. The smartest thing I did was, I gathered up all the perpetrator’s things

and I had put them in a backpack near the front door. I left him a note saying, "I'm not sure if you took your house keys to the beach or not?". So, if he had taken his things and went elsewhere, it would demonstrate that he chose to leave the home. When I got to my sisters' friends place, I realised I didn't have any body-wash or nappies or snacks for the kids. So, I went to the shop and had to buy a few things. The perpetrator had removed almost all money from me. I had just \$500 that I had hidden.

The Police didn't mention the kinds of things that I should collect from the house. It would have been really good to have a list of things that are smart to collect. Like, "hey, if you're leaving your home, you're probably going to want five days' nappies, you're going to want bottles, you're going to want formula. You're going to want toddler milk, you're going to want four t-shirts, a hairbrush, some body washes and toothbrush and things". Those things are really expensive to go and buy when you don't have them.

I was quickly going through the money I had hidden. Most people in my life were not thinking about whether I had money or not, because I ran my own successful business and had a good income. My sister actually said to me, "are you right for money?" I told her the truth and she looked at me really surprised. I said, "no, he had all the money". She said, "all right, I'll drop some money in your account". I had to stop her and say, "please, don't. I've just set up a second account, can you use it?" So, I wish someone had given me a list of things to pack, I could have saved some money. It would have offered a little bit of clarity and structure to when I got back to the house rather than just randomly picking up things, on the very worst day of my life.

The perpetrator came home the next day. So, he apparently checked out of the hotel fine. I phoned the hotel to see if he had vacated the room. The hotel reception staff said that everything was okay but they let me know that they helped him order a cab as he didn't have his phone. I know he went to our house because our neighbour texted me, she's a complete busybody. Her text read, "He's on the back patio and he pacing back and forth, is he locked out? He seems angry". I replied, "he's not having a good day. Could I ask you just to stay away from him, please?" And she said, "okay, weird request. I was going to make him a cup of tea" and I asked her not to do that. She replied, "is everything all right? You looked really terrified on Sunday when you guys drove out". So, I wrote back, "Did I? Sorry, I didn't mean to worry you. We're good. Just don't go near him". She let me know he stayed there for about seven hours and that he was pacing back and forth.

"I used two thirds of my \$500 to buy him a room in a boarding house for a week... then I had an address to write on the Protection Order form".

I received the Protection Order forms from Alinta from the Domestic Violence service. The forms all asked, "what address are you going to serve him at?" But he literally didn't have any other address here because he is Canadian, and he also didn't make any friends here. I didn't know his work address either. So, it was key to my safety that he had an address. I used two thirds of my \$500 to buy him a room in a boarding house for a week.

I sent him a text with the address and said, "I've arranged for this. It's near your work. It's on a train line. It's convenient for you to get to and from work for the next week. We need some time apart. I've booked this for you, would you mind going there? It's easier for you to move out and keep going to work than it is for me to move out with the kids". He replied "no, this is ridiculous. I don't need to do this". Eventually he relented and said, "yes, fine". He'd obviously had

enough of being stuck outside. So, he went and stayed there. Then I had an address to write on the Protection Order form.

I also asked for a condition on the Protection Order application form, that I get the house and all the possessions in the house. Sometimes, legally, the other person who left the house and is without the house and possessions ends up having to ask for stuff in the divorce. Having moved back from Canada, we'd only just set everything up in house, we didn't have a stick of furniture when we moved in. So, I was not about to turn around and set up a whole new house for the third time in three years, when he had all of our money. I said to him, "you can get a furnished studio apartment. But I can't do that with three kids. I need the house". Book him accommodation and you've got somewhere to have him served. So, the Magistrate asked him, "where are you staying? Is it at this address? Are you paying for that?" He said "yes" to everything. So, the Judge said, "Okay, good. You've got a place to go that you can afford, and then gave us the after condition".

When I initially called the Police Station, they said, "yes, that's fine. We'll take care of you when you come in". I was expecting, I don't know, maybe, to slump a little in the corner or to be told what to do. Or to be guided in some way or assisted. But that wasn't the case. All they did was call the Domestic Violence Service. I was looking at my sister and trying not to say too much in front of Alice who was playing with James and Joshua. I wasn't going to say to the Police in front of everyone, "he sat over me like a gargoyle all night. I kept waiting to wake up being strangled by him again". He didn't strangle me that night, but he previously had strangled me multiple times. That was my concern while he was sitting over me. So, I would have appreciated if the Police took me to a separate room and maybe be given an opportunity to fall apart or at the very least, speak up. Because so far, I had been super stoic and keeping no emotional outbursts. I was still trying to keep it all together.

"I had told the Police that the perpetrator had strangled and attacked me, and he said he was doing it in his sleep. I think the Police just saw this as a mental health issue... No charges have ever been laid".

The Police didn't explain all the options either. I was really grateful that Alinta had explained to me about how women's refuges weren't an option either. I had told the Police that the perpetrator had strangled and attacked me, and he said he was doing it in his sleep. I think the Police just saw this as a mental health issue. But I had reported his violence multiple times to that Police station and to their specialist DV person. I really thought that the right approach would have been a lot more support. I thought the Police would have put in the paperwork for the Protection Order. They also didn't charge him. No charges have ever been laid. So the DV service said "we'll help you and but you'll have to go to court". I was trying to be polite and not fall apart, I hadn't eaten in God knows how long. I was at my wit's end. I hadn't slept the night before. I'd driven from the coast. I've had to keep everyone together. Then I was presented with, "write your own Protection Order".

I stayed up until about two o'clock in the morning. I was sobbing. I'd really lost my stoic shield and was crying. I was crying while writing this Court document that I didn't understand. I sent in the form and I thought I did well and I got a couple of hours of sleep. I was tear-stained, and face wrecked. Not a good look. I was trying to keep my three children amused and out of the way and not bothering anyone at my sister's friends home. The DV team called and said, "hey, the form's not the way the needs to be. Can you make changes?" So, I just said, "tell me what to say". I spent that day and that night rewriting it. When I got to Court and they said, "this is no good". I responded, "it can say whatever you need it to say but I just need it". So, they kind of helped write it but I was really at a loss as to what it needed to say. I had no idea of the process. If someone told me what the process was prior to beginning, I probably wouldn't have undertaken it. I finally got the Protection Order but when I went to pick it up at the next window after being in Court and it said, "temporary orders". I remember being really

confused so I asked the DV Court rep, “it says temporary orders?”. She replied, “yes, we’ll see you next week”. I don’t think I’ve ever been so shattered. Shattered to my core. Next week? Next week was outside the realm of possibility at that point. I had not slept in days. I had barely eaten. I had no money. I had to come back and do this all over again?

I couldn’t understand the document. I was exhausted and shocked that this was just a temporary order. The DV Court rep said, “look, the temp order is pretty good. It’s about as good as you’re going to get”. I had to ask, “but what does it mean? And why are they saying I have to come back?” Then she said “it just means you have to come back here next week. He will be served now”. Then I realised “he’s going to know what I said”. She confirmed that, “yes, he’s going to know what you said, you’re free to go home now. There’s no other process to do or anything, you can just go home”. I was thinking, “there is no home. Are you mad? What? He’s going to know we did this and it’s temporary”. Life just got a lot worse.

I was thinking, “there is no home. Are you mad? What? He’s going to know we did this”. Life just got a lot worse.

I just walked out of the Courtroom and out of the Courthouse on my own and just started crying, just thinking, “oh, shit. This is horrendous”. The Court also requested that I write more documents for next week. At that moment, Jessie called me. When I was a teenager, I baby-sat Jessie for 5 years. I called Jessie my practice kid, she would have been about 25 years old when she called me that day. I answered the phone, “hey, always happy to hear from my darling girl”. She said, “what’s wrong?” I said, “nothing. What’s up?” Jessie said, “no, what’s up? you don’t sound right”. I told her, “I’ve left him I’m just leaving the Courthouse, now, it’s kind of complex. I can tell you about it another time”. She said, “I’m sorry, I’ve

called at a bad time” and hung up. Honestly, I was just really relieved to not be on that phone call. Because I don’t fall in front of my children and right then I didn’t have it together, not even a little bit.

When Jessie called back an hour later, she said, “HEY! I bought a plane ticket and I’m coming to look after you because I think you need somebody”. Jessie lived in Sydney. I was so moved she had offered to do this. I told her enough of what had happened. I also let her know that I had decided to return to the house, “it’s going to be really scary. He might come and kill me, but we can’t live anywhere else. We’ll have to go home”. Jessie was determined and came down. Before she arrived, I covered all windows at the house with paper, so that if he turned up, he wouldn’t be able to see where we were inside the house. I really thought he would turn up. I was in constant contact with the DV team who were doing lots of safety checks and checking around access and then they sent someone out for a safety check and did different things. Having Jessie there was really good. It meant I could make the phone calls and do the things. She would say “I don’t know how to look after babies”. So, I showed her some basics, and she helped me so much. On the first night she said, “I feel like what I need is a cup of tea and some chocolate and a lay down”. And I laughed and said, “yes, welcome to motherhood, darling. Come with me”. She said, “I can see why women would do this, little ones are really hard, aren’t they?” Jessie stayed until I had to go back to Court. I also had a friend come to Court for the second time, which I didn’t realise I needed until I was driving there and let her know that I was going and she said “do you need a support person?” I responded, “no” but she said, “actually I think you do”. As soon as I got back to the Courthouse, I dissolved. So, my friend started asking the DV workers questions, “What’s going on? Why is this not working? What are you doing about this? Why aren’t you helping her? What do you want her to say?” and trying to prompt them into really

helping me. Because the Police didn't do the initial application for the Protection Order and didn't charge him, I've had endless trouble since. When I went to the Police to say he had breached the Protection Order the Police wouldn't take it seriously. Often their feedback was, "this is a private application". Even when I wanted it renewed after 5 years. The Police said, "well, it's private application so you have to do a private application again". I refused I said, "I'm not going back to Court and writing that document again". I wondered what the point was. He had 270 documented breaches and we had 15 organisations saying he was breaching the order and that he was dangerous. But the Police and never once actually breached him or charged him with his crimes. So, I've lost that protection order now, not that it helped that much. They really fought me on getting it.

During that first year, we had to evacuate the house seven different times. I flew to Sydney to stay at Jessie's place for 10 days after one incident. The perpetrator had expressed clearly that he was going to harm me. He would send disappearing text messages. I tried to screenshot them. The messages showed a little timer saying that they were expiring after five seconds. So, the messages had just enough time for me to read but not do anything with. I was reporting everything. But again, there was no action from Police. At one point, I called the Police, and a male and female Officer came out to the house, and I said to them "I am in danger. He's spiralled. He's dangerous and now he's got little to lose now that he's lost the job. He has sent me a text message where he refers to himself as the "children's sperm donor", which is about as much of a gap from "our children" that you're going to find. His violence increases when he uses distancing pronouns. I want you to go and have a chat, probably a welfare check. Even if you don't breach him, can you just go and tell him, that that's an inappropriate way to speak to me? And that that's not of good behaviour?" The male officer said, "well, the guy's had obviously just had a bad day. He has lost his job". I said "yes, that increases the risk and danger, right? It doesn't decrease it. It's not that he's just going to have a bad day on his sofa. He's lost his job. He's acting more dangerously now". The male Officer said "if you saw what we saw, you wouldn't even think that was bad. I don't know why you think that's so bad". I tried to explain to the Officers that his pronouns have changed and why that was dangerous. I gave examples of when the pronouns changed and when that was a problem. But the male Officer held firm, "well, he's not even being rude, really. He's like, he's not threatening you. He's not saying he's going to come and do anything to you". I said, "he just called himself their 'sperm donor' and I'm explaining to you that the threat is embedded in the pronouns". The male Officer again said, "I just, I can't see that". So, I said, "okay, so you're not going to do anything, then". He said, "I don't know what you want me to do, if you have any more problems, you'll give us a call. We need to go and help people with actual problems". They left and I thought "well, now I feel an idiot for calling the Police to come out". But at the same time, I knew that I was in danger and attempting to advocate for myself and needing to explain his actions, history, mental health conditions and the danger was so difficult.

I called my sister again and explained everything. She said she would look after the children for a while.

**So, my friend started asking questions
"What's going on? Why is this not working?
What are you doing?
Why aren't you helping her? What do you want her to say?"**

The male Police Officer said “if you saw what we saw, you wouldn’t even think that was bad. I don’t know why you think that’s so bad”.

Police don’t take any action, what are your next steps. Eventually, I just had to move out of the house because it never felt safe. I spoke to the landlord and we broke the lease. Moving was difficult but he couldn’t find us. No one took me seriously despite there being evidence of extensive abuse and of all kinds and ongoing protection order breaches. The Justice Department paid me a grant for being a victim of his acts of violence, but he was never charged.

I’ve taken my kids to see psychologists a few times. We’ve gone to, I think, four or five different psychologists just to check them out, make sure they are all okay. Because I’m mindful that, as much as I protected them from the worst of it, some of those experiences would have been terrifying for them. The feedback every time was about the phrase, “I’ve got this”. For Alice, this was her number one thing. That’s all she needed to hear to know the world’s okay. One of the psychologists said to me “if you don’t say that, she’s going to be really, really, really stressed out. But when she hears you say, ‘I’ve got this’, and she knows that that means, ‘mum’s got this’. She has 100% faith that you absolutely have this”.

I have had to self-advocate for the last ten years. He went on to commit more crimes back in Canada and despite binders full of evidence, it is still really difficult to get any assistance. He is now Court ordered to have zero parenting time, zero contact, zero decision-making. He can not contact me, my friends or family, known associates, places of work, stalk online etc. It’s like a Protection Order and a parenting order and it lasts for life. I got it done this way because there wasn’t a lifetime Protection Order option, and there should be. He is no longer part of our world. The system failed me over and over again, but I have not failed my children. I have fought in two countries’ legal systems, and I have won our freedom and my life back. I’ve got this.

Alice decided to stay with her dad. I went and stayed in temporary accommodation. Better to be safe than sorry. I realised, this has to stop. It just has to stop. Everywhere I went, no one would help me. There was no relief, it was endless. The Police didn’t make the application. The Police hadn’t breached him. So, what are you supposed to do when the

“But when she hears, ‘I’ve got this’, and she knows that that means, ‘mum’s got this’. She has 100% faith that you absolutely have this”.

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
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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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