

\* 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.

## Matilda

When my mum was very young, she married a man who was abusive to her – it was domestic violence. But in her day, our society always looked to the female in the marriage to say, "what did you do to annoy the male to make him do that to you?" I knew about my mum's experiences, and I thought that I would never end up with an abusive partner.

My ex-partner Zane was two different people. There was charming Zane and terrifying Zane. I only met terrifying Zane after we had moved in together. When we were first dating, Zane very quickly made himself my whole world. Zane and his world were my world. I lost all connections with all my friends and my mum. Zane didn't want me to work. So, in the end I didn't work anymore. I was just available to Zane all the time. Zane became the only person I had.

**“Why are you doing that? Why are you acting like you're scared?”**

Zane was, and probably still is addicted to methamphetamines and to other drugs. If someone offered him drugs, he would take everything and anything. But he preferred drugs that made him feel up, so crystal meth was his go-to. When people take that drug, they are not able to sleep for days and weeks at a time. Zane already had a really bad temper, but when he was using drugs, it was exacerbated. Sometimes Zane would make a fist and he would raise his closed fist up and aim it at my

face. Sometimes he would go to throw a punch at my face, but he would stop himself right before hitting me, just before he made contact. It was a threat. There was a time I was sitting down on the couch. Zane came over to me yelling and screaming and then he raised his fist up and threatened to punch me. I always thought he really was going to punch me in the head, so I lifted my arms around my head and tried to curl into a ball to protect myself. He would go ballistic when he saw me respond like that. He would yell, "why are you doing that? Why are you acting like you're scared?"

He raised his fist so often that whenever he threatened to punch me, I would respond by trying to protect my head and face. He would be so angry whenever I protected myself like that. He would go wild particularly in front of other people, like his sons and their friends. He didn't want other people to see me trying to protect myself. Not that I was responding like that to deliberately shame him. It was just something that I did because I was genuinely scared that he was going to assault me.

Zane told his sons and his friends that I "provoked him" because I would always argue back. Zane stole my car all the time. This was my car that I had worked hard to buy and pay off. Zane would be off for hours doing goodness knows what with my car. Zane also tried to cram stolen push bikes into my car too and in the process, he completely scratched up the whole inside. When he came back, I would say to him "Zane it was scary to me that you took my most valuable asset and you didn't ask me. Please don't do that to me again". Zane would also regularly take all my money. Every time I would get a little bit ahead, I would have to give him everything I had. He used all my money on his habit - it was so intense. So, then I literally had nothing to eat. I had to go to shelters and churches to get food parcels. I felt so much shame every time I had to do that. Never in my life before meeting Zane did I have to accept food parcels. I felt very low. Really disgusting. I blamed myself too. But I

was starving, and I needed something to eat, so I had no choice. I was shut off from a lot of things. I didn't have money to go and do anything. So, a lot of the time I was thinking about how to get food. I didn't have a lot of my belongings with me, because I had left them at home with my mum. I couldn't just go and get them because she lives four hours away. All I had was a couple of books. I didn't really have access to the internet because I didn't have money to get credit, and my phone had been stolen. It was like I was cut off from everything.

Sometimes I would go to the library because I could go on the internet for free. I would go and do that, because I liked to go and look at things. I was still very connected with my child care career, even though Zane didn't allow me to work. At the library, I tried to read up on what was happening in that space, so that I wasn't completely disconnected. But if I spent too long at the library, Zane would accuse me of meeting someone there. So more and more I just stayed at home in the one spot to minimise what I was being accused of. You can't have a rational conversation with somebody who is that high.

I told Zane that he was hurting me, I asked him to stop. Just stop. Sometimes I tried to find out why he thought it was okay to hurt me. But Zane responded by categorising my behaviour as just being "a drag", just "nagging" him, just always "whingeing and always moaning". He would tell everyone that I was "always having a go" at him.

**"What's wrong with her? You could do so much better".**

But I was just asking for some simple respect. I also felt trapped with Zane because I was so isolated from all my family and friends. I had no one supporting me. All of Zane's friends and his kids believed him. So many of the people around Zane thought he was the most amazing person in the whole world. He charmed everyone he met. He fixed kids bikes and there were a lot of stories about how he had helped this person out and helped that person out. So, if there was any inclination that there was an issue in our relationship, everyone thought I was the problem. Everybody around him thought that I was horrible to him and that I didn't treat him right; that I was mean to him all the time, and that I was always angry. I remember one of his friends saying to me "how wonderful" Zane was. It must have been the look on my face, my face telling a different story. I said nothing, I just could not agree with that statement. Then this person said to Zane, right in front of me, "what's wrong with her? You could do so much better".

I remember saying something to Zane about the traffic being a "bottleneck". He didn't know what the word "bottleneck" meant so he said to me, "you think you're so smart, you think you're better than me, you stupid bitch". Zane just pushed me down, pushed me down, pushed me down. It got to the point where I thought, "okay, I'm just not going to say anything". When I was with Zane one-on-one I would cry, and I would say, "why are you doing this? Why don't you care about me?" Why do you think so badly of me?" I think that that made it worse, because he would always retaliate for making him face his behaviour. The longer our relationship went on, the less and less I spoke. I started thinking "it's me, it literally is me that's the problem. Maybe I am just like a whinger and a downer because I keep having a go at him for all these things. But maybe I shouldn't be doing that". So, I started questioning myself, "am I just unlovable, just not, maybe I deserve this"? I felt like I was worth nothing. I really thought that.

## “Why are you doing this? You promised that this was going to stop”.

Zane’s drug dealer, CJ, often came to our house. Zane had a weird relationship with him. CJ would supply Zane with drugs, and Zane would then distribute the drugs for CJ in exchange for a small supply of drugs. Whenever CJ wanted a dose of drugs, Zane would basically have to be at his beck and call to get the drug orders out to others while CJ was high. Once, it was the middle of the night, and CJ pulled up out front of our house in his massive van. He turned his high beams on and pointed them right into our bedroom. CJ got out of the van and started pounding on the front door. He woke the whole house up. Zane got up and started walking over to the front door. I said to Zane “why are you doing this? You promised me this was going to stop”. Zane just said to me, “no, fuck you, I’m going, whatever, just shut the fuck up, bitch”. Zane and CJ left. I got in my car, and I followed them. I can’t even remember what I was thinking or why I decided to do that, but I followed them. I turned my lights off so they couldn’t see I was following them. Zane and CJ stopped at a shed in the middle of the bush. There were no neighbours around, no one around at all. I was trying to figure out if there could be something more going on here aside from the drugs? I wanted to know whether or not there was any sexual aspect to it. After about an hour Zane and CJ got back into the van and took off. I thought about following them again, but at the same time I would be driving without my lights on, and I just couldn’t do it any longer. I had to let it go. I never told Zane I followed him and CJ.

Once Zane had disappeared for two weeks. When Zane came back home, he was skin and bone. His skin was so yellow, even the whites of his eyes were yellow. He hadn’t slept for over a week. Then when he was starting to fall asleep his body was really jerky. His nervous system was probably completely shot to death, he was just jerking and shaking. I just was like, “you are so unwell. This is what you’re doing to your body. How do you think this is fun?” Zane didn’t want to get treatment or anything. He slept for about 24 hours, and he finally had something to eat. Zane kept saying “I’m going to make better choices, I’m going to make better choices, and I’m going to be better”. I went and had a shower, and when I came out of the bathroom he was gone. Zane didn’t come back for another three days. He was off with CJ again. I always tried to make sure that the home environment was clean and tidy. I did that for me, but I also did that for him. Whenever Zane came back, he would always want to shower, and he demanded that I kept things clean for him.

One night Zane had been using. At about one o’clock in the morning Zane grabbed me by my hair and dragged me out of bed. Zane wanted to be driven to meet CJ so that he could pick up more drugs. Zane had four other males with him too; his oldest son who was about 18 at the time and three of Zane’s friends. I had no choice. So, I got into the car. Zane was in the passenger seat, and his son, and his mates were sitting in the back. I said to Zane, “why did you wake me up? You could have gone on your bike”. Then he started yelling, “fuck you, bitch”, and “you’re such a downer bitch”, and all these terrible things. The guys in the back of the car didn’t try to stop Zane. I whacked his arm, it wasn’t very forceful, I just wanted to stop him yelling at me. Zane then punched me hard in the side of my face.

I pulled over immediately, I was in so much shock. It was pitch black. One o’clock in the morning. Zane’s son and his friends all got out of the car very quickly. They didn’t say anything to me or Zane. They just all ran off. We were in their local area, so they just scattered. I developed a headache straight away. But Zane made me start the car again and drive him to the dealer’s house. I was crying and he just kept telling me to “shut up”. I felt scared because this was the first time that Zane had actually punched me with a closed fist. Up until that point he threatened to punch me, but he had always held back. I managed to drive to the dealer’s house. I waited in the car until he got his

## He was like, “you can’t go to hospital”.

black and bruised. I said, “I should go to a doctor”, but Zane said that I wasn’t allowed. He was like, “you can’t go to hospital”. Zane didn’t want me to go to hospital because he was in a lot of trouble with the police at the time although that didn’t come out until a lot later. To this very day, I still have a damaged to my left eye from this assault. I have to wear fake eyelashes and I have to constantly brush my eyelashes, because now the eyelid is so droopy. Thankfully my vision is okay, but it’s very upsetting how just how damaged my eyelid is.

A few days after Zane assaulted me in the car, I went to visit Zane’s youngest son, Connor, who was in juvenile prison for sexually assaulting a young boy. I went to visit Connor because the jail had called me to say that he was on suicide watch. I also went because Zane, his own father, wouldn’t visit him. So, I went. I still had a massive black eye on the day I went to the jail – my eye was swollen shut. I sat down opposite Connor. He looked at my black eye, and all he said to me was, “what did you do to dad?” I just ignored him, and I just asked him how he was going. In that moment, I thought of my mum and how she had shared with me stories of her brother’s response to seeing my mum with a black eye. My mum’s brother was very aware of her husband’s violence against her, but all he said to her was, “what did you do to him? You must have done something terrible to get hit so bad”. I tried to explain to Connor what Zane did to me. Connor just looked at me and then he said, “you should have just done what you were told”. I was shocked and disgusted that my partner’s son, who was a more of a boy than a man, could say something like that to me. I felt in that moment that I was seeing the future; when Connor, the child, would become an adult, enter a relationship, and just do all the same behaviours as his father. It wasn’t as though I was sharing anything new with Connor. Zane used violence against Connor his whole life. Connor even refused to call Zane “dad”, he just referred to his father as “Zane”.

**“Oh, what did you do to dad... You should have just done what you were told”.**

Connor’s mother, Katie was Zane’s first wife, and she died when Connor was only very young, about 4 or 5 years of age. Katie died unexpectedly. She apparently passed away in her sleep. So, the children had no mother, and they were raised alone by Zane. But he wasn’t a proper father. From what I could see as an outsider coming in, Zane was their only parent, so they still relied on him, but they didn’t respect him. They had a lot of resentment towards him because of his abusive and selfish behaviour. So, Connor and his brothers refused to call him “dad”, because they were like, “he’s not a dad”. They were only connected by their DNA.

Zane’s kids used to tell me a lot of things about Zane. Before meeting me, Zane had at least two other serious relationships which had both ended because he was violent. Connor’s older brother Sonny also told me that before Zane and I were together, Sonny had a party and he invited some of his high-school friends over. Sonny said that Zane was talking to one of his high school friends, Tess, and that he slept with her. Zane gave her drugs in exchange for sex. I felt disgusted. It was all of those examples in my mind that contributed to me later on really pushing hard to make sure that Zane didn’t have any unsupervised access to our child.

Zane's kids wouldn't talk about their mum with me, except one day Connor's brother Sonny said to me "nobody is ever going to compare to my mum". So, in my mind I had this idea that the boys mum, Katie, was Zane's one true love and he didn't do any of the things that he did to me to her. I felt like I wasn't as good as her. I actually asked Zane, "did you ever treat Katie the same way?" Zane said, "no". To be honest, it was more than likely that he was violent and abusive towards her. Zane didn't just convert into the person he is all of a sudden when she died.

**"I quickly got out of the shower and kind of hid to the side so he couldn't see me and then I opened the door quickly and caught him standing outside the bathroom door looking in".**

At some point one of Zane's drug-buddies, Mitch, moved into our spare room. I was so scared of Mitch because he was also on drugs, and he did a lot of horrible things. I caught him coming into my room several times at night. Mitch would come into my room and just sit at the end of the bed and stare at me. I pretended to be asleep so that he didn't know that I had seen him. I couldn't even lock my bedroom door because there was no lock. So, I would put things against the door so Mitch couldn't get in. Once I put a laundry basket against the door and I heard it move during the night. The sound of the door against the basket woke me up. I opened my eyes and I remember seeing the bedroom door begin to close. I knew that Mitch had opened the door ajar and was looking in so he could watch while I slept in bed.

Mitch also would stand at the bathroom door and open it, slightly ajar and he would stare at me when I was using the toilet. One time I got the sense that he was staring at me while I was in the shower. I quickly got out of the shower and kind of hid to the side against the wall so that he couldn't see me and then quickly opened the door and caught him standing outside the bathroom door looking in. He looked surprised when I opened the door, but he didn't say anything to me. I was really scared. Mitch was terrifying, feral, just so scary. I told Zane about what Mitch was doing. Zane just said, "you are a massive slut, and you are trying to tempt him". I obviously wasn't trying to "tempt" him because I thought Mitch was disgusting. But, according to Zane, going to the toilet, which is a basic human right and Mitch watching me, was all my fault. I knew that if Mitch ever assaulted me that Zane would blame me for "putting yourself in a compromising position. You were putting yourself in the position to tempt him". Therefore, in Zane's mind Mitch's behaviour was my fault. Because I am a female.

Although I was scared of Zane, he was also my protector as well. I relied on Zane to keep me safe from men like Mitch. Sometimes Zane would leave me on my own in the house with Mitch. That was terrifying. One day Zane went missing, it was getting dark, and I didn't want to be on my own with Mitch. I was so scared. So, I went looking for Zane. I went to all his friend's houses hoping to find him. At one place, his friend Tina answered the door, she laughed at me and said "oh my God. No, are you looking for him again, why don't you just give up Matilda?" Eventually, I found Zane at an apartment, I recognised his push bike outside. The front door was open. As I stood at the doorway into the apartment, three kids rushed towards me. One of the kids, a young boy maybe 9 or 10 years old, threw something at me, a piece of food or something. This young boy started yelling

**"Oh my God. No, are you looking for him again, why don't you just give up Matilda?"**

at me “fuck off you fat whale”. At the same time, Zane and a young woman come out from a bedroom together. I don’t know what Zane was doing at her house. I started crying, but Zane, his friend and the kids laughed at me. I just wanted Zane to come back home because I was so scared of Mitch. So, I asked Zane to come home with me. That just made them all laugh at me even more. Zane eventually came home with me. But Zane didn’t change his behaviour, he didn’t care.

A little while later, I was driving Zane to another dealer’s place. I was angry because I knew that when we got there, I would have to wait outside in the car while Zane went in. I knew that by the time Zane would come out, he would be under the influence of something. I was just so sick of it. I said to Zane, “why do I have to always do this? I’m so sick of this”. I also reminded Zane that he promised me he was going to stop and that he was going to try and get clean. By this point, Zane was already very drunk, and he didn’t like what I was saying. Zane started throwing cans of alcohol

**“Why do I have to always do this? I’m so sick of this”.**

at me. The cans were all open, half drunk. The alcohol from the cans went flying everywhere as he threw them at me. I tried to get Zane to stop. I said, “You’re destroying the car again”. But he didn’t stop. I kept asking him “why are you doing this to me”? Zane kept saying “It’s because you won’t shut up, you just won’t shut up”. Because Zane was sitting next to me, the cans he was throwing were hitting me really hard. It

was so painful and scary. They were very heavy aluminium cans. So, I was crying as well and getting really angry and upset. I was also anticipating that Zane might try to grab the steering wheel and drive us onto the wrong side of the road, because he had done that a couple of times in the past. I felt like that might happen again because of what he was doing. He also started kicking the car panel and I thought that the air bag was going to deploy. It was at that point that I decided to pull over. I had to pull over on the side of a very busy road. Zane got out of the car, and I got out of the car too. I thought “oh my God, I don’t want him to run off”. I really didn’t want to return to that place with Mitch without Zane. Zane started looking around and he saw a bus stop post laying on the ground. It had a concrete block, a mount, on one end of it. It was a massive block of concrete. Zane lifted the bus stop post up by the concrete mount, he held the concrete block over his head, and he threw it at me, but the post dragged on the ground. I moved back and away. The concrete block just missed me. A few people saw Zane throw the concrete block at me and they called the police. Although I didn’t see the witnesses, I learned later that there were multiple police reports. The police came very quickly, and they arrested Zane. The police took me separately with a female police officer to the police station. The female police officer was asking me a lot of questions. When I was in the police station, I could hear Zane screaming and yelling from his cell, or whatever part of the police station he was in. Although I couldn’t see him and he couldn’t see me, but he must have known what was happening because he was screaming, “don’t you open your mouth, you fucking bitch”.

**“Don’t you open your mouth, you fucking bitch”.**

The police officer said that I could give a statement if I wanted to, but that it didn’t really matter if I did or didn’t because they were going to charge Zane regardless. It wasn’t me pressing the charges, it was the police. I thought to myself, “well, I might as well give them a statement and tell them what happened”. In my mind I was thinking “I’m going to get Zane out of trouble this way, because I’m just going to explain to the police that I was being annoying, and I made him do that to me”. I told them what happened, and they said they would still press charges against Zane. The police also encouraged me to reach out to my mum.

I remember dialling my mum's number and then I hung up before she answered. The police said I could go. I asked what was going to happen to Zane and the police said that they were going to tell him he had to stay away from me, and they would apply for a protection order for me and that if Zane breached that order, that he would be in a lot of trouble. I waited for Zane outside. But I eventually went back home. Mitch, the housemate was sleeping when I got back home, thankfully. I was awake most of the night waiting for Zane to come back. Eventually Zane came back at about 1 am because he had to walk from the police station which took a long time. Because the police wouldn't even give him a lift. I was so relieved when Zane got back, just relieved not to be alone in the house with Mitch. But when Zane got back, he was angry with me because I had a copy of the statement and he saw it. Zane knew that I had spoken to the police and as much as I tried to explain

**“You had better get these charges dropped, you'd better get these charges dropped”.**

to Zane that it wasn't me that pressed the charges, he was, like, “you had better get these charges dropped, you'd better get these charges dropped”. But Zane just wouldn't get it. Zane kept blaming me and saying that I had pressed charges and I had gotten him arrested. Because Zane was yelling and it was the middle of the night, a neighbour had called the police. The officer arrived at about 2am and said to Zane, “you are not supposed to be here with that girl” and the police officer arrested Zane for breaching the protection order.

Zane was in jail. He was being held on remand. It was at this point that I learned of the full extent of Zane's criminal history. The police domestic violence officer let me know that Zane was definitely known to the police in the area that we were living in and that he had something like 200 charges against him. More charges than I had ever known about. So, Zane was sentenced, and he didn't get out of jail for three years. I did not want to go back to the place we were living in with Mitch and his friends. Reluctantly, I called my mum, I had nowhere else to go. My mum has been my biggest support system. Mum said that she was always there for me. She said she left it up to me to reach out. I was reluctant to call mum because I guess shame also played a factor in it as well. I had tried to downplay Zane's abuse to protect him, and probably myself. I knew that what was going on was wrong, but I almost wanted to pretend that it was not happening, that he wasn't violent. I did make excuses for him, and I changed details, so I wasn't telling the whole truth.

A couple of weeks after Zane went to jail, I realised that I was pregnant. To be honest, I was really happy, because not only because I was going to be a parent, but I was happy because I was going to have Zane's baby. I thought this is going to be a second chance for him to do things right now. I also thought, “now I'm going to be in the same category as his wife because I'm going to be a mother of one of his children”. So, maybe now it will be different, and Zane will respect me. I had all these dreams and hopes. I thought I was able to move past what had happened. I also tried to “sell” Zane to my mum. By this stage I had really reconnected with her. My mum had all these suspicions, and she said she “didn't think it was right”. Recently mum told me she could see the truth, that Zane wasn't going to change, and I think she knew that through the lens of her own lived experience. But mum would always try and be optimistic for me and about my dreams of what our family was going to be.

Zane didn't come out of prison for about three years. I was financially supporting Zane while he was in jail. We had lots of phone calls and I visited him. Zane told me he was doing all these programmes in jail, programmes like anger management courses, and that he had plans to change. Zane said he was so looking forward to being a dad again.

**So, I drove Zane to the bottle shop because it was safer than having Zane start screaming at me. But the reality really hit hard. He bought alcohol.**

The day Zane was released, I went to pick him up. By this stage our child, Billie, was 3 years old. I didn't take Billie when I went to pick up Zane. I was a little bit late getting to the jail because there was a traffic jam. I remember Zane was calling me while I was driving. He was getting really demanding, saying "where are you? You'd better get here now". Up until that point, all the conversations over the last 3 years had been very calm and loving. All of a sudden, I was hearing old Zane again. I felt so disappointed. I finally arrived at the jail. I picked up Zane and we left. As I was driving, Zane said to me, "pull in there", and he pointed to a liquor store. I asked, "what are you doing?" Zane was on parole. He had been put on parole because he had done all of the right things in jail. He had ticked all the boxes and done all the courses that he was supposed to do. One of the things that Zane told

me he wasn't going to do when he came out was to drink alcohol because he said that he was aware that alcohol makes him incredibly volatile. I realised in that moment that what he had been telling me on the phone was a performance because the phone calls from the jail are all recorded. The truth was that Zane didn't care about changing. So, I drove Zane to the bottle shop because it was safer than having Zane start screaming at me. But the reality really hit hard. He bought alcohol. Even though he was on parole, and he knew he was not supposed to drink.

Zane told me that while he was in prison he had learned all the tricks to get around the urine drug and alcohol test. I had waited all these years for the person I had been speaking to and visiting in jail – that version of Zane was a totally different person. Then the same old Zane comes out of jail. On the way home Zane started drinking and he told me about all the courses that he had done. He laughed and laughed about how the psychologists and facilitators "think they're so smart" but they are so "dumb" for doing all of these "fluffy group chats", and "kumbaya bullshit". Zane kept boasting about how he had "fooled them all". Zane said, "I have got myself out of jail and it was just a big laugh". He told me he had learnt all these new and smarter ways to do certain crimes and he laughed that "there are more drugs in prison than there are out here".

I just felt so sick because I realised, "oh my God, even the system that's supposed to offer protection can be manipulated by this person". It all went downhill from there. Zane, Billie and I were living at my mum's place. I wanted that safety net for Billie. The first time I left Billie alone with Zane, was to take my mum to the doctors. When we left the house, Zane was normal, but when we came back, he was weird, really weird. I couldn't immediately tell why. I thought "he's drunk", but it wasn't obvious. Billie had a soiled nappy. I had been gone for about 90 minutes and so Billie had been in that nappy for a long time. I was used to changing Billie straight away, and to see Billie with a soiled nappy shocked me. Billie had started to get a red bottom. I said to Zane, "what did you do, why didn't you change this nappy?" He didn't say anything. I went to the kitchen bin, and I noticed eight empty bottles of beer in the bin. I worked out that in the 90 minutes mum and I were out of the house, Zane had drunk eight bottles of beer. That's why he was off his head. That was it for me. I broke up with Zane and kicked him out of my mum's house. There were just so many things that Zane had done in the past and it was clear to me that he hadn't and wasn't going to change. He was not safe for Billie.

I ended up in Family Court fighting Zane for Billie. Zane never actually wanted Billie, but he took me to court because he wanted to mess with me. It was like I had even though I gotten away from Zane,



I couldn't really get away from him, because he still had this ability to affect my life in a negative way even from afar.

The Family Court judge granted Zane supervised visits with Billie even though Zane never came to court, and he never came to the supervised visits. He never intended on doing anything for Billie. Zane's lawyers told the Family Law court that I was a drug addict. So, both Zane and I were subjected to drug testing. We both would get a text message on the same day at the same time, to say, "you have got one hour to go to this place and get this test done". It cost \$70 each time. I showed up for each and every one. I had to urinate in front of another human, which was so degrading. I had to do this six times just completely randomly. Luckily, I had a really supportive boss, she knew everything. The results were sent to both my phone and Zane's phone. The results said my name and my date of birth and the result, "negative", and then it would say, Zane and his details, and then it would say, "no-show", or "didn't complete the test". That happened each six times and I was "negative, negative, negative", and he was "no-show, no-show, no-show" every single time. The whole thing was just a game for him.

### **“Why did you antagonise him all the time?”**

I remember being at the Court, and in the end the Judge appointed an Independent Children's Lawyer (Children's Lawyer) for Billie. Zane and I had to be interviewed by the Children's Lawyer separately. Zane showed up at his 9:00 am interview drunk. Zane had told this lawyer that I had chased him through the house. That part was true, I was so hungry, I was starving, and I needed some of my money from Zane just so I could eat. Zane picked up a frying pan and threw it at me,

it missed and went through the kitchen window. Zane more or less described this. But the Children's Lawyer distorted this in court, and she asked me, "why did you antagonise him all the time?" My mum was standing next to me in the court room, she didn't say anything, because she didn't want to affect the case. But later on, mum said, "I cannot believe that we are in 2022 and you as the victim, are being asked why you antagonised him". The Children's Lawyer didn't give me the opportunity to respond, it was more of a rhetorical question and then she made her way off. I know, in that moment, I was scared when the lawyer said that to me. I thought, "I'm going to lose possibly 50% custody of this child. My baby is going to go into Zane's hands". The Family Law court were condoning Zane's abusive behaviour, and they could have put my children at risk.

I knew that Child Protection services previously removed children off Zane multiple times. One of the times, Zane bashed his daughter who was only 5 years old very badly when he was drunk. He took her to hospital, and she was removed and put into her mother's care. But this was not allowed to be brought as evidence in our case for Billie. My lawyer tried to find information about these previous child protection cases, but we were told that "it wasn't relevant to the current case". I was horrified that Zane's history of abusing children would be treated as inadmissible and basically irrelevant by the Family Law court. Nothing could be more relevant. I tried to explain in court what Zane did to me. I tried to explain that he drank eight bottles of beer while supervising Billie. Of course, I didn't keep the beer bottles and I don't have a DNA test to prove that he drank them. I could only say that what that meant to me was that Zane is not a fit parent for this baby. I also tried to tell the court how Zane had laughed about

### **“My lawyer tried to find information about these previous child protection cases, but we were told that “it wasn't relevant to the current case”.**

“fooling” everyone in jail by completing all these programmes and for getting the psychologists to sign off for his parole. The court didn’t take anything I had to say seriously at all. I believe the Family Law court perceived me to be that “vindictive” person. Like I was just trying to keep Zane from his child because I am a terrible vindictive female. No, I had to escape from this person.

I felt as though everything was going Zane’s way. Despite having done significant jail time for assaulting me, previous child removals due to assaulting and neglecting his kids and over 200 charges he was still going to get Billie. I was looking at it and thinking, “how could it be possible?” I felt sick to my stomach for literally months at a time because the Children’s Lawyer had blamed me by suggesting Zane did what he did because of me. That lawyer was a person in a position of authority in terms of this Court process. It was so awful. It was like being in the trauma situation again and it was all just a big joke to Zane.

In the end decision went my way, that I have sole parental responsibility for Billie. It was only because Zane was a no-show at court, and he didn’t comply with the random drug testing. He didn’t attend any of the supervised visits that he was granted. So, the judge had no choice but to make that order. My fear is it that if Zane had just done the basics and shown up for court, it could have gone a very different way. That scares me, because they didn’t take Zane’s violence seriously. If Zane ever turns around and decides that we’re going to go back to Family Court, he can spin all the same lies, and say that he’s changed. Zane could gain access to or have custody of Billie. I live with that fear in the back of my mind all the time.

My life with Zane was so horrendous. I can’t even actually picture myself in that life anymore and who my Billie would be if we were still in that situation. If I was still there, I wouldn’t be alive, because I either would have committed suicide, been killed or starved to death. I was skin and bone. I don’t know how Zane could be that horrible, literally toxic. Billie would be a completely different person by now if we had stayed. I can’t always predict what’s going to happen in the future, I have certainly learnt from my experiences, and I want to impart what I’ve learned to Billie so that Billie can have a safer and happier journey in life.

In terms of personal values, I have a few that are my non-negotiables now, and these are, honesty, respect and transparency. These are my values not just in a romantic relationship, but also with people that I work with and my friends. I feel like those values need to be reciprocated to be able to connect with another person. These values are my purpose now as a mentor or guide to others.

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### 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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### 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](http://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.

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