

* 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.

ALEXANDER

I'm a victim-survivor of domestic violence and now I am working with other victim-survivors. Working in this field is an act of resistance. I'm now like, "Fuck you! I am going to make a real difference out there. I'm now going to stand with other women and I'm going to make it really known that violence is not okay. I will never be silent". For 20 years, I blamed myself and felt that I was faulty. I tried to hide my past and I carried the burden on my own. I held the shame that "I let" someone treat me poorly. Now after sharing my lived experiences, I focus on what I did for my own safety and the values I held onto. The

blame and shame do not belong to me, it belongs to the men in my life who were violent and abusive. The shame also belongs to all the people who blamed me and held me responsible for men's use of violence against me. This includes my family and friends – even though they meant well and at times my family were the only people who were really there for me. It also includes all the victim-blaming messages from our society. All these responses made me believe that I was faulty and that there was something wrong with me because I kept going back to the relationship.

My mum was a young single mum. I was one of 4 girls. Mum became a single mum after she left her partner who was a domestic violence perpetrator. She left him when she was pregnant with my youngest sister. My Pop also lived with us, and he helped raise us. We were all very close. I always thought Mum was the most amazing strong woman ever. She gave us a great upbringing. I was given so many opportunities. I had lots of friends around me, and I loved school and the small town we lived in. Financially, we were not very secure, but I was always loved, and so were my sisters. My Mum met a man, Keith, when I was about 13 years old. Prior to mum meeting Keith, I had a pretty good childhood.

Mum spent a lot of time at Keith's apartment. Pop would just be at home with us. I remember thinking "where's my mum" a lot. Our home life changed dramatically because of Keith. Keith was an alcoholic, and I did not like being there with him and he never made us feel welcome at his place. Mum and I started fighting. I remember one time cutting myself. I was trying to show my mum that I was distressed by Keith's behaviour. I wanted her to choose me and my sisters over Keith. I could not understand how she would want to be with him and not our family. I felt alone at home, and I know my sisters did too so we would avoid home and go out with friends.

It was during this difficult time in my teenage years that I met Jason who was about the same age as me. We met at a high school party. Everyone was drinking and so were we. All my friends were beginning to date, and I guess this was the first time that a guy had shown me any real interest in me. I fell hard and fast for Jason. He made me feel attractive, wanted, and gave me the connection I was needing. I thought Jason was very good looking. He exuded confidence because he had life

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experiences of partying, drinking, smoking marijuana and being with girls. After the party Jason and I hung out every day and within the week I lost my virginity to him. Within days of being together Jason, told me that he had a fight with his Mum and had to go back to Armidale, where his dad lived. I lived in Brunswick Heads on the far north coast of NSW so I thought our summer love was over and I would never see him again. I was heartbroken and remember crying and feeling alone again. Jason called me most days and we would speak for hours. Mum was not at home, so I would stay up all night on the phone to Jason. I can now see that Jason “love bombed” me as a way to entrap me. He made me feel like I was the only person that mattered to him, and he said that he would do anything to be with me. I remember getting in a lot of trouble off mum over a phone bill and so she told me that I was not allowed to contact Jason anymore. I was shattered again. However, Jason would still call frequently.

One night Jason told me that he had a fight with his dad and that he moved back into his Mum’s in Brunswick Heads. Jason and I were able to continue our relationship. Jason lived nearby so we spent every day together. I would go to high school, and I also worked on a casual basis at a pizza shop. Jason did not attend school or work. He spent his days with his friends, smoking marijuana and surfing. He would pick me up from work and we would spend the rest of the afternoon and night together. He slept over most nights at my place. I remember Jason starting to use some emotional abuse and coercion in the early stages of the relationship. Jason tried different tactics, such as acting “sad” about something I had “done” that he didn’t like. Jason would get angry at me for hanging out with my friends instead of hanging out with him or for being late home from school when he was apparently “waiting for me”. Sometimes he would blame his behaviour on his life situation. He would appear helpless, like nobody cared for him and he said he was lonely. Whenever I would show him care and empathy, Jason responded by saying he was “sorry” for getting angry and he would ask me if I could just lend him some money to “buy a stick”. I would lend Jason money from my casual job to help him buy marijuana or cigarettes. I did this because I knew he would be less aggressive if when he had pot and cigarettes. I also experimented with marijuana but did not like how it made me feel so I did not smoke. But I did start smoking cigarettes.

Sometime later, Jason told me that his Mum had kicked him out of the house and that his dad “didn’t want” him. He told me that he had “nowhere to go” and that he needed to “move in with” me. I felt sorry for Jason. I couldn’t believe his Mum kicked him out and that he had no family who cared for him. So, I took on the role of being the person who would love him. Jason used this against me in our relationship especially when I would resist his abuse. He repeatedly told me I was the “only” person who loved cared about him and without me he would have “nothing”. He made me feel responsible for him. I sincerely believed that for the next few years of our relationship. When Jason moved in, my family’s routine and stability kind of left. Jason invited all his friends over who smoked marijuana. Our house became like a drop-in centre. My sisters and I all held strong values around school and despite what was going on at home, we woke up each day and went to school and we all completed high school. We were all working after school and on weekends to get some money for ourselves as Mum did not have any money to spare.

Jason however knew how to manipulate me and would use the narrative, that I was “the only person who loved” him.

When I was about 16 years old, Jason started cheating on me with other girls. He also flirted with my friends and said sexually harassing remarks to my sisters. His cheating made me feel unattractive

and not good enough. There were several times that Jason went out to party drinking, and I find out he had cheated on me with another girl. When I found out about it, I would try to leave him. I was hurt and confused. Jason however knew how to manipulate me saying that I was “the only person who loved” him. I wanted to believe that he could change. But he took advantage of my caring kind nature.

I hated it when Jason drank and I much preferred him to smoke marijuana as he was nicer to be around. Every time Jason planned to drink, I dreaded it because I worried that he would cheat on me - he thought he was “God’s gift” to women. When he was drunk, he was embarrassing, loud and obnoxious. One time, I remember Jason and I were at my friend’s house, and we were all drinking. He was drinking a bottle of Tequila. I decided to leave about 10pm as Jason had started flirting with one of my friends. I pulled him aside and told him it was not fair to me and to stop. Jason did not like what I said to him, and he pushed me. I left the party crying and went home and Jason stayed. The next day I found out that my friend had asked Jason to leave the house because of the way he treated me. But Jason refused to leave, he kept drinking and then when confronted to leave again by a group of people he began kicking holes in the walls of my friends’ place. My friend was so angry at him, and our friendship ended shortly after that. I went back to be with Jason, and my friend did not understand why after he had acted so badly. So, I just avoided my friend out of shame. Jason ruined a lot of my peer relationships by acting in this way. My friends and I were all very young, I didn’t understand that what Jason was doing to me was domestic violence, and I don’t think my friends did either although I think they wished I would leave him.

During this time Keith had moved into the family home. Mum and Keith set up a bedroom out in the caravan, so they were still isolated from the family somewhat. It didn’t feel like a loving home with Keith there. Mum was in the house, but she was not around very much as she was often out with Keith. One evening I remember Keith

“Don't talk to Alecia like that, she deserves respect”.

being drunk and shaping up to my Pop. I think Pop had been angry with Keith for talking badly to mum, for putting her down. I can’t remember exactly what Keith said exactly, but Pop said to him, “don’t talk to Alecia like that, she deserves respect”. Keith walked up to Pop and stood in front of him, Keith was very aggressive, very macho. My Pop was unwell and had some health challenges and we were so worried for him. I remember my mum and my sisters were all screaming at Keith, “don’t do that to Pop”. I could not understand why Mum forgave Keith for that. I never respected Keith after doing this to my Pop. I adored my Pop. I never named that Keith was abusive to my Mum, that he was perpetrating domestic violence. I don’t think I named his abuse as domestic violence until I was in my mid 20’s. I struggled immensely with this realisation as I had escaped my relationship with Jason by then. I wanted my Mum to do the same.

When I was about 17, Jason cheated on me again and I had enough. I told him to leave. Jason moved out of my family home and back to his Mum’s. But that didn’t last long, Jason soon found a place for himself about a 30-minute drive from where I lived. I think we were separated for about 4 months, and I just concentrated on my HSC and work. Jason eventually contacted me, and he said he wanted to see me and show me his new place. We started re-connecting again and I spent most nights with him. I was still a little hesitant. I did not invite him to my high school formal and after party in fear of how he would act. He demanded that he go with me. Even though I could see he was upset and angry at me for not inviting him, I did not give into his demands.

I had dropped in to see Jason after work. Jason was in a bad mood. He wanted me to lend him money for food and marijuana. He started questioning where my money had gone. Jason accused me of wasting my own money on my formal and for going out without him. I walked away from Jason and sat on the lounge - trying to get away from him. Jason had a pet rat, and I was always a little scared of it as it would bite me, and it left a horrible smell of rat urine in the unit. Just as Jason came into the lounge, the rat urinated on the carpet. Jason picked up the rat and threw it hard against the brick wall. The rat was stunned, bleeding and was making injured noises. I cowered into the sofa lounge trying to escape and hoping Jason would not turn his rage on me. Jason picked up the rat and he took it into the bathroom yelling at the rat, saying that it was so disgusting. I knew in this moment I needed to get out of there, so I grabbed my keys from the kitchen and left. I drove home to Mum's. The next time I was at Jason's, the rat was gone. We never spoke about it. He never mentioned it, but I think he probably killed the pet rat that night.

Jason was full of apologies and remorse after the "rat incident". He waited outside of my work with flowers, and he begged me for forgiveness. He kept pressuring me that "I was the only person who cared". He manipulated me constantly by playing the victim. I did feel sorry for Jason. I really wanted to help him to make changes. Jason told me that for his 18th birthday he wanted to get my name tattooed on his body. I hated the idea. I tried to talk him out of it and to get something else. But he said that he wanted to be with me forever and this was the way of showing me that. I

thought the tattoo was like a stamp of ownership over me, like we would be tied together. Jason also put pressure on me to get his name tattooed on my body, but I refused. I remember thinking, "I'm not spending my life with you. This isn't what I want". I wanted a different life for myself in the long-term.

When I finished high school, Mum and Keith decided to move away to a rural property. I didn't want to move with them, so I decided to move into Jason's house, and I continued working at the Pizza shop. I had just turned 18 and I fell pregnant with Jason. This was a very confusing time for me. I worried about being a young mum like my mum had been. I also worried about having a baby with Jason. Mum was very supportive and said the decision was all mine and she said she would support me with whatever I decided to do. I was struggling with the decision. I eventually made the decision that I wanted to terminate the pregnancy. I also knew at the time, that I would have had to consider how I would keep the baby safe from Jason's violence and abuse. Initially, Jason was supportive of my decision, that he understood that I was not ready and that he would stand by me. He also said that he wanted to keep "our baby". I did not trust Jason to be there on the day of the procedure. I needed to be strong, and because I never knew what Jason would say or do and I just knew I could

"You killed our baby...the baby is a part of me, and you destroyed that...I will never forgive you".

not handle him being there on the day. Jason would later use the termination against me. He emotionally tortured me by saying things like "you killed our baby", "the baby is a part of me, and you destroyed that", and "I will never forgive you". He also said, "that you could kill a baby, that shows who you really are". Jason had no regard for me at all. He attacked my self-worth and who I was as a person. He used one of the most difficult decisions I have ever had to make for evil. He didn't care what I had been through. I still stand by my decision to have had the termination.

"I thought the tattoo was like a stamp of ownership over me, like we would be tied together".

I had no idea Jason's use of emotional violence was domestic violence. I was seeing Keith treat Mum and Pop poorly and all I knew was that I preferred to be with Jason than at home with Keith. I knew if Jason was stoned and had his marijuana, he would be fine. I do wish I had received some education at school or through the media about domestic violence and healthy and unhealthy relationships. I was smart at school, and so were my friends. They might have responded to me better to me if they had understood domestic violence. But no-one knew and so no-one asked if I needed help or called out Jason's abusive behaviours. No one told me that the violence was Jason's problem, not mine. Instead, I felt so much shame for going back to the relationship and felt that nobody understood me.

“You go get a job. I'm working and I don't even smoke, it's not fair”.

Jason's use of coercion and violence against me started to get more intense. Jason's marijuana habit was costing him more and more money. When Jason didn't have marijuana, he was emotionally and physically violent towards me. As much as possible, I tried not to give Jason my money. I worked hard for my money. At times, I said to Jason, “you go get a job. I'm working and I don't even smoke, it's not fair”. He would always kick off whenever I said anything like

this. So, it was just safer for me to give him my money.

Jason started to rock up at the pizza shop I was working at. He would demand money. When I saw him walk in, my response would always be to go very quiet. I was trying to maintain some professionalism and not alarm my boss, colleagues, or the customers. The moment he walked in, I could feel him. I would think to myself “he needs marijuana”. I knew based on his look. It was just really a look, something that would be very hard to describe in a court. He would come over to me and I would give him the money, at least \$20 because I knew that he would be able to go and buy a stick of weed with that. I also knew that by giving him money, this would be the fastest way to get him out of the shop.

One time, I saw Jason take money out my wallet without asking. I confronted him about this. Jason put the money down on the bench for a moment, I grabbed the cash and held it in my fist and told him, “No, you are not taking my money this time”. I had the money in my right hand and wouldn't give it to him. He began yelling at me, calling me names. He was pushing and throwing household items around. Jason then grabbed on to my hand and told me to give the money to him. I refused. I was crying and said, “I want to go, leave me alone”. Jason then bit my right hand, the hand that was holding the money. I let the money go. It dropped to the ground. I was shattered that he had bitten me. He then said, “if you want to go, then leave”. I walked out the front of our unit crying, and he came up behind me still yelling for me to leave then and he pushed me from behind, and fell down a flight of stairs. I rang mum to come and get me. I sat at the bottom of the stairs still in the unit block waiting for Mum. I was too ashamed to go anywhere as I had been crying and I didn't know where to go. I was very aware that Jason could come down the stairs at any moment and I continued to look around waiting for him. I also kind of knew he that he would not make a scene out the front of the other units. When Mum arrived, I told her what Jason had done to me. She was furious. Mum went up the stairs and knocked on his front door.

“How dare you! How do you like it? Pick on someone your own size”.

Jason opened the door, she grabbed him and started pushing at him until she had him up against a wall. I was standing behind her and I will never forget how strong she was, she yelled at Jason “How dare you! How do you like it? Pick on someone your own size”. Jason started pleading “I’m sorry, I’m sorry”. Suddenly he was the “victim”. It felt nice to see him scared of my Mum. I was cheering and felt this was justice for what he had done to me. After that I went home with Mum and had another attempt at leaving.

I went back to Jason. One weekend, I was driving Jason and I to see his family. He wanted to get some money off them. I was going about 100kmph on the highway. Jason started putting my family down for not lending him any more money. He was also saying that he was upset with me because I had no money to give him either. He thought it was unfair that I was giving some of my money to my Mum. I started refuting some of what he was saying and defending my family and myself. Jason suddenly pulled on the handbrake. He could have killed us both. The car spun around and somehow, I managed to get control and pull the car over to the side of the highway. I came out unscathed and fortunately the car didn’t hit anyone. You know those moments where you’re like, “man, I’m lucky I’m alive”. I really wondered how I lived through that one. I just screamed at Jason, “get out of the car, get out”. He was like, “well, fuck you”, but at least he got out. I left him on the highway and drove off. I remember thinking to myself, “I can’t just leave him there in middle of nowhere”. So, I turned the car around, circled the highway and I said to him, “get back in”. But he refused to get in. After that I remember I just drove to mum’s place. I don’t know where he ended up.

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I knew his behaviour was not okay. A part of my resistance was to leave the relationship after incidents like this. I would always go home to Mum’s. But whenever I was back at Mums’ place, it was impossible because of Keith. Keith was often more abusive than Jason. Keith was an alcoholic. If I was with Jason, I could get him marijuana and then was easier to manage. But at home I couldn’t control Keith’s drinking, I had no control there. Watching Keith treat my mum and sisters badly was horrible. So anytime Jason would reach out, I would want connection, and he would be remorseful. At times felt trapped in an impossible situation where no matter where I turned, I did not feel safe or happy.

Jason tried to ruin my relationships with my sisters, my mum, and my good friends. He constantly said to me “your mum and sisters hate me”, like this was my fault. He could not see that they didn’t like him because of his behaviours. As a result, I was not seeing the people I love very often. I didn’t want to visit them with him. So, I would try and put up with as much crap from Jason as I could before I had to return home to Mums’ place. I knew each time I went home, my friends and family would hate Jason even more and that just made my life harder.

I had a couple of good friends who were always there for me and who always wanted to hang out. They told me that I could do better than Jason. One of my friends was a hairdresser and she would invite me to get my hair done and this would make me feel special. I don’t remember any happy times with Jason during the five years I was with him. The only good memories I have from this time were the memories spent with girlfriends, my sisters and mum. But all my memories of being with Jason were about me surviving, earning money to feed his drug habit and managing his violence. I thought that it must have been so confusing for my friends to watch me come in and out of this relationship.

One of the most painful responses I received from a close friend of mine was, “if you go back to him again, we can’t keep being your friends. You really have to stand up for yourself this time”. This was hard as it intensified the shame I was feeling - I felt faulty that I kept going back. I thought there was something wrong with me. My mum also told me that my aunty had said to her “if she goes back to him again, you need to wipe her and have nothing to do with her. Then she won’t be able to handle that so then she’ll leave him”. I said to my mum, “that would not have worked. That would’ve been bad for me, I really needed you”.

“If you go back to him again, we can't keep being your friends, you really have to stand up for yourself this time”.

When I was 19, Jason and I got a unit together in both our names and in this place, things went from bad to worse. I remember that every morning when Jason woke up, he would hassle me for sex. If I said that I did not want it, he would start emotionally abusing me. He told me I was unattractive. He questioned who I had been with. He spoke poorly about my family or friends. Of course, when he woke up, he had not smoked any marijuana, so he was angrier and meaner than usual. I remember thinking, “just hit me, it would hurt less than the horrible mean things you say to me”. It was “easier” for me to just give Jason “sex” every morning than it was to be emotionally tortured by him. At the time I did not name to myself that Jason had coerced me into “sex”. But I hated it. Jason’s mouth stunk, his tongue was dry and crusty from his marijuana use and it made me feel sick to the

“I would say nothing, zone out and wait for it to be over”.

stomach. But it was easier than then his emotional abuse so I would go through the act of having “sex”. I knew that if I got through the “sex” Jason’s emotional abuse would stop at least temporarily. I would say nothing, zone out and wait for it to be over. Then he would get up and start his day of managing his marijuana addiction.

One time Jason had two of his friends over. I was upset. I had worked all day, and these men were all stoned on the lounge. Jason started harassing me for money for marijuana. I got angry and said how unfair it was that he wanted more money and said he should get a job. Jason asked me to repeat myself and I said back, “you are a fuckhead Jason, you don’t work, you are always stoned, get a job and earn your own money”. Jason was angered by this, and he grabbed me and dragged me into the bedroom in an attempt to shut me up. Jason was pissed that I called him out in front of his friends, and he was yelling at me. Jason called me a “bitch” and said that nobody cared about me. I was standing up to him and yelling back. Jason tried to stop me yelling at him by putting his hands around my neck and choking me. I started screaming, “help me”. I was really screaming. But Jason’s friends never came. I remember thinking, “why don’t his friends sitting right outside the door respond? How could you not do that?” I remember feeling really let down that nobody came and thinking, “what sort of human doesn’t come to somebody screaming for help?” After that, I blacked out, I just don’t know what happened, I don’t remember it at all. By the time I came out of the room,

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Jason's friend were still there playing video games stoned out of their minds. Jason sat down to play with them, and I went out the back crying and chained smoked by myself. Jason eventually came out to see and again he asked to borrow some money. I just nodded. I was too numb to care.

By this point, I could no longer go home to my mum's place, because then I would have to face Keith's violence and abuse. So, I was more isolated than before. I had become quite thin by this stage. My only real coping mechanism was to sit out the back and smoke cigarettes. It was an escape. I would sit outside for hours and try and get away from it all. I thought doing this was helping me. I never knew what mood Jason would be in, so no wonder I was anxious because I was always anticipating his abuse.

My Pop passed away. I went home to Mum's to be with my family during the days following his death. I had left my mobile phone with Jason because he didn't have one. When I went back to my apartment, I got a text message, but it was addressed to Jason. The text was from Jessie, one of Jason's friends. I realised quickly that Jason had been using my phone to contact Jessie while I was away. Jason picked up the phone and read the message. He said that I needed to leave and that I should go back to my Mums'. I had just come back home. I didn't want to leave. Jason was very persistent. I asked Jason if he was cheating on me. He responded angrily, "how dare you question me about this". I ended up leaving - I had no energy for Jason and his emotional abuse that day. I took my mobile phone with me. While driving back to Mum's place, another text came through from Jessie saying that she really wanted to spend the night with Jason, and that she hoped he could get me to go home. So, there was the proof. Jason had an affair while I was grieving the loss of my Pop. This was the breaking point for me. Back at Mum's, I took to my bedroom for about several days. I would not eat or come out of my room. I was devastated about the loss of my Pop, and I was in shock that Jason could do this to me especially during a time like this. Eventually mum came into my bedroom and said to me "no more". She said that I had to get myself up and decide what was next for me. I decided that I was really done with the relationship. I contacted my best friend in Brisbane and see if I could move there with her. My best friend agreed, and soon after I began making plans to relocate. I rang Jason and told him it was over and that we needed to end the lease and clean the unit out.

Over the next week I continued to work at the pizza shop. I was trying to save money so that I could move out of Mum's. I finished work one day and walked down the stairs to see some flowers resting on my car window screen. I looked around. I couldn't see Jason anywhere, so grabbed the flowers and put them in the bin. Then out of nowhere, I could see Jason. He was across the car park, and he was running towards me. I freaked out and jumped into my car. I started to reverse. Jason looked furious. When he got to my car he was hitting at the windows and then started to kick the side of my car. He damaged all panels of my car that day. A car I would have to pay off for years and that I could not afford to repair.

"I don't understand what a pretty, nice girl like you is doing with someone like him".

likely would have "destroyed the photos" or "he will deny having them". One of the police officers said to me "I don't understand what a pretty, nice girl like you is doing with someone like him". It

Shortly after this, I went back to our apartment to start cleaning it out. I noticed that Jason had caused thousands of dollars of damage by punching and kicking holes in several walls. He had also stolen all the photos I had of Pop. Mum and I went to the police station to see if they could pay Jason a visit and retrieve the photos for me. The police said that they were limited in what they could do. They said Jason

was just a real life-changing moment. Jason had always made me feel unattractive and not good enough. So, when this young policeman said these words to me, it was just enough for me to think to myself “he’s right, I am”. His words helped. After this, I was able to finish cleaning the unit out, save the money I needed to move to Brisbane with my best friend.

Jason left me in massive financial stress. I had a car loan that I had continued to lend against – even though the car was badly damaged. I had to pay back the loan we had for the TV and a gaming console. I also had bills for all the property damage Jason had done to the unit. I had no way of proving that it was Jason who did the damage. I could not afford to pay it. So, the real estate agents put my name on a national tenant database which made it impossible for me to rent again under my own name.

When I moved to Brisbane with my best friend, I started to have some real fun times. But I was working very long hours at a local café trying to pay off all these debts, loans and to stay on top of rent. I felt I could never get ahead. I was still a very anxious person and a very heavy smoker. I was struggling with my health after many years of living in fight or flight mode. I never spoke to my friends or anyone about the things Jason had done to me in fear of being judged by them.

About a year later, Jason contacted me over social media. We started talking again. Jason said he was visiting Brisbane on a night out and he asked if we could meet up. In many ways I wanted to show him how far I had come since we separated. I gave Jason my address and the name of a pub we could also meet up at. I didn’t tell my best friend out of fear of being blamed and judged for this. I was ashamed of the trap I knew he was setting for me.

I was out at the pub with my friends when I got a text at about 11pm from Jason stating “I am sitting in your lounge room. Come home”. He also sent me a picture of him laying on my bed. He had

“I am sitting in your lounge room. Come home”... He had broken into our house.

broken into our house. This really freaked me out. I instantly felt unsafe. I think my reaction was so big because living with my friend and having my own room was the first time I had safety since my childhood. I didn’t live in fear anymore. So, when I received these texts, I remember thinking, “he can’t be here, he’s broken in, I don’t feel safe”. I just called the police who went to the share house and got him out. A few days later Jason sent me some abusive text messages, “you told me to come, you’re such a bitch”. But his words didn’t bother me this time. I just didn’t have further contact after that.

About a year after leaving Jason, I met my current partner, Gabe. Gabe and I have been together for 20 years now. Gabe is the gentlest soul, and he treats me with respect and care always. I find it difficult to believe that my relationship with Jason used to be my reality. Gabe has supported my goals of going to University and I am now a psychologist. My mum is still with Keith. I have found it difficult over the years to watch her in this relationship and to see Keith use very similar tactics to Jason in his attempts to control her. I limit any time I spend at the family home, but I am still close to Mum, and she visits regularly and spends time with us.

For a very long time, I carried an intense feeling of shame with me. I never spoke to anyone about my relationship with Jason - not to Gabe and not to my current friends. I was too fearful that the people in my life now might think there was something wrong with me. I can understand now that I was taught to feel this way because of the ways so many people in my life blamed me or other survivors. Like I heard people in my workplace question why survivors “don’t just leave” the

relationship and I noticed that in general, survivors were really frowned upon for their “choices”. Because of all these victim-blaming attitudes, I had to hide that I was a victim-survivor.

My healing occurred when I was able to share my lived experience with a social change initiative which created a safe and respectful space for me. I was slowly able to see that I had no reason to feel any shame. I am a caring, empathic person. Jason took advantage of these qualities. Looking back, I am surprised by how strong I was as a young teenager to continue to attend school, to hold down employment and keep relationships with my friends and families despite what was occurring, with Jason and Keith’s abuse, behind closed doors.

I can now see Jason used several coercive tactics to control me - he financially abused me, used reproductive abuse, emotionally tortured me, sexually abused me, and physically abused me. I have shifted all the shame back to where it belongs, with Jason, Keith and to the people who responded so poorly. I want to continue to grow and advocate for change for other survivors who are forced to carry any burden of shame for violence and abuse. Now I will never be silent. I want all women to know that they are doing what they know is right to uphold their dignity and their safety.

“Looking back, I am surprised by how strong I was as a young teenager”.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange would like to thank the person with lived experience of domestic and family violence who has generously shared their insights for the benefit of others.

We acknowledge that despite our best efforts to assemble with a person a more accurate representation of some of their experiences of violence, we can never fully understand all that their experiences mean to them now or through their life. We understand that no one’s life experience can ever be fully represented in language or any other form.

Handle with dignity

You have been reading a carefully assembled excerpts of peoples lived experience of domestic and family violence. These are not simply another ‘story’, ‘sample’ or ‘case study’.

Whilst consent has been obtained to share these accounts, we ask that as the custodian of these copies that you uphold the dignity of the people who shared them as you distribute and store them. Tips for handling with dignity:

- Keep the copies in an envelope distinct from paperwork and reports
- Explain the importance and value of these accounts before distributing them
- Collect any copies left behind by delegates/participants after workshops

Further resources and support

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

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

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

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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.
