

Hello,

My name is [REDACTED], and I am a born and bred Adelaidean. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] My mother was his emotionally disturbed but beautiful trophy wife. She herself, I found out in my later years, had been physically mistreated by her male relatives as a teenager. A commonly accepted occurrence of the time.

I grew up as the youngest child in this highly dysfunctional and psychologically abusive family. I was an unwanted accident. The mistake of a drunken business weekend away and reminded of this fact regularly as I grew up. In essence, blamed for my own existence.

My father, as the narcissistic, misogynistic male he was, treated everyone as his inferior, especially his female family members. My mother passed the pain, lack of interest and cruelty from him, down onto her children. We were not to be seen or heard within the home. Support, kindness or understanding was absent within the family dynamics.

Unable or unwilling to cope with parenting as their older children became rebellious teenagers of the seventies, their standard neglectful silence became emotional maltreat and non-negotiable hostage taking.

My sister, five years my senior, unfortunately failed in her rebellion against our parents and received harsh punishments for her teenage crimes. But in the true spirit of my screwed family, she chose to pay her anger forwards down the line onto the next most vulnerable target, me. I was not only chastised by my parents for my older siblings' transgressions, but I was also used as my sister's whipping boy behind the closed doors of our shared bedroom. My parents aware of my plight did nothing to protect me.

I grew up in loneliness and fear. Never having a safe place to shelter, a shoulder to lean on or a kind word uttered in my direction. I was both verbally and then physically attacked by my sister when I became old enough to fight back. I grew up believing I was nothing. That I had to play the role of the good daughter in order to survive. I kept my head down, heart closed, and mouth shut.

I have briefly mentioned my childhood experiences because it is vital for people to understand the repetitive cycle of generational abuse. I was raised to be vulnerable, subservient and susceptible to these types of manipulators. [REDACTED] years of psychotherapy has help me process that.

Most of my later teen years and early twenties were spent in the company of my parents or alone for months on end. My social circle was small as to keep me easy to manage by my parents. Having a job while studying was band. I lived within the small spaces my parents allowed me to occupy. At a time when the few friends I had were traveling, getting degrees or married, I was at home alone watching Bill Collins Saturday night at the movies. I was desperately lonely and apprehensive that I was being left far behind by my peers.

Then I met a man at the boutique where I started working, a [REDACTED] store. His mother worked for the same company interstate. He seemed very sweet and shy. From our first meeting he pursued me even though he knew I wasn't really interested in him. I'd been stalked before, a few times in my life, from men who don't understand the word no, so this didn't faze me. He was incredibly open and open and persistent with his affections for me, something I'd never experienced before. I never felt threatened by him back then at all. He introduced himself as an animal loving, artistic, non-smoker and social drinker. Ticking many of my boxes.

He lived interstate and would take the time to drive over to see me regularly. Being the good obliging submissive girl, I was raised to be, I saw him out of responsibility and guilt. After months of his unrelenting, uninvited presence, I told him I didn't want a long-distance relationship and to stop calling me. The next day without my knowledge, he moved to Adelaide. And so began the good daughters [REDACTED] years and counting of domestic violence.

As I continued to see him out of feeling of guilt, I kept getting myself deeper and deeper into the relationship and didn't know how to end it. Meanwhile, my parents told me their parenting job was over and I needed to move out of home. I was recently made unemployed as the [REDACTED] where I worked changed hands. I was penniless, jobless with no transport, but my parents wanted me out. Desperate, with no one to fall back on, (let's call him Dick), my abuser was there with open arms. I moved in with him a year after meeting.

Dick was very smart for someone semi-illiterate, who dropped out of school at fifteen. He sized me up very quickly and alter his behaviour to win me over. I now understand he loved bombed me. He did the same with my parents and in his own words to the court psychologist had then in his back pocket. For a while it was good. I felt I was loved for the first time in my life, but it didn't last long. My kind, gentle, artistic, animal loving non- smoker was actually a violent, psychologically disturbed chain smocking alcoholic.

It started by him isolating me from my few friends and bad mouthing my family to me. Then came the subtle name calling and gas-lighting. When thing went wrong, somehow, he always made me think it was my fault and that I had no right to be angry, upset or question him. I tried to talk to my sister and parents about what was going on, but they shut me down every time. Friends did the same. It was a taboo subject. My voice was silenced again.

Things exoculated over time, as I found myself completely ensnared in his grasp. Dick started smashing furniture, destroying my belongings and harming pets when angry with me for some perceived mistake or disrespect. I went to my parents demanding they listen after one such explosion and explained how Dick was behaving. I needed confirmation of the destructiveness of this relationship. My father told me it was normal behaviour between couples. My mother was only interested in if the [REDACTED] she had given me was safe. Confused, betrayed and unsupported in my concerns, I went back to Dick, accepted his please for forgiveness and the new role cast on me as a drama queen.

Things were good for a long while after my first full attempt at escape. Dick asked me to marry him. I said yes, feeling no other options open to me and completely underserved of anyone better. This was not the first time Dick had asked me to marry him, it was the fifth. The first time was six weeks after we met. I also had the added pressure from my catholic mother, a good virgin bride, not live in sin. When I moved in with Dick because of my parent's desire to have me gone, my mother called me a whore as she threw me out of the family home (not the last time she did that) and denied me any ability to return. I was still trying to be the good daughter at all costs, even my own happiness.

Not long after the engagement, Dick's cycle of violence started again. Once, when I stood my ground, he picked up the hot fry pan from the stove and seared it into his arm, giving himself third degree burns. He claimed it was my fault. It was always my fault. Other times he cried suicide if I endeavoured to leave. I called off the engagement and tried to go home to my parents. Stupid I know, but there was no one else. They told me I was not welcome there. Again, I was a drama queen over exaggerating and should not be given the time of day. I was nothing and deserved nothing. I went back to Dick believing I was useless and unlovable.

Over the next twenty years we married, built a home together and had four children. I was bullied into each and every pregnancy. The more children we had the harder it was for me to leave. I had little to no say in any decisions about our life. He manipulated everything in our relationship including my family members.

I was a work from home mother, making designer gowns for almost nothing. I looked after kids all day, sewed in the evening and was Dick's lackey renovating around the house on the weekends. I was working twenty hours day and was exhausted. Numerous times during our marriage, he sent us to the brink of bankruptcy, stealing for our mortgage for him personal expenses, (which were many), while the children and I went without.

I believed Dick was on a three-year cycle. One year would be good, I'd have the fake Dick back, the man I loved. He'd love bomb me again. Then, for no real reason I would feel things shift and be walking on eggshells again. That tension would slowly build into a series of aggressive outbursts, followed by one almighty explosion and then back to the begging for forgiveness. Over the cycle started once more.

By the time our third child was born, his new tactic was to trap me against a wall, screaming abuse at me while his fist hovered about my face threatening to pulverise me. Sometimes he'd punch a hole in the wall next to my head. If I managed to escape, he would throw me over his shoulder and carry back inside the house. Once he made me beg for my dog's life as he held the dog's neck in his hand threatening to snap it. I did as I was told.

I convinced myself it was ok, that's the only way to cope. There was no one to turn to anyway and he didn't hurt the kids. Technically, he never hurt me physically either, he just threatened. How could I prove abuse when there were no visible bruises or scares. Why would anyone believe me if my own parents didn't. I was always good at playing a part. I was the good daughter and now, the adoring wife.

When our youngest child was born the abuse hit a new stratosphere and he began to physically dominate the children. Pushing, shoving and bullying disguised as tough parenting. Now with two smart, cheeky teenagers who knew how to push his buttons, life was very precarious. I found myself constantly pleading with the kids to be quiet and keep their heads down. Asking them to do what I had done in my childhood.

My eldest son took most of the physical punishments, punches, beltings and squeezing down on the back of his neck as discipline. My eldest daughter took the emotional abuse. Smart and beautiful, he did everything to cripple her self-esteem, as he had done to me. The younger two didn't exist to him, although he would on occasion smack them too. He did everything he could to destroy family relationships, pitting everyone against each other.

I left him numerous times over the years but always went back. Alone, no real paying job and four young children to look after I'd return every time. I knew he'd never let me leave with his children, his good family guy costume and I could not leave them alone with him. So, I stayed and protected them as best as I could.

Things deteriorated even further and soon the bedroom became his new place of attack and degradation for me. The rapes began. He criticised my cooking, parenting, body, face, intelligence, family and friends. I'd be blindsided constantly with new forms of humiliations and cruelty. All while showing the good hard working family guy to the rest of the world.

On one occasion Dick went so far as to strangle his children because I ask him for help with them. He picked the two middle children up by their throats, choking them and screaming at them. I remember vividly my eight-year-old daughter hanging lifeless against the wall and my eleven-year-old son's hands helplessly trying to find something to grab hold of as he hung in the air. I had to hit Dick in the stomach for him to release them. His violence once again justified as discipline and my fault for asking for help.

After this incident I went to see a psychologist for family counselling. I desperately needed help. This was the first time the word 'abusive' was used about my ex-husband. The psychologist brutally criticism me, placing the responsibility for Dicks behaviour on me. This crippled me, re-enforcing my parents views, shutting me down even more. Now Dick understood his total control over us, and our complete isolation, he became relentlessly aggressive.

When the eldest were little, he was a good, involved father. I don't know what happened to him, but Dicks hatred of us now openly showed on his face. The last three months we were together he gave us no money to live on. After the first five weeks I enquired passively and he screamed at me, it was none of my fucking business. We were told a broken dishwasher would stay broken because we weren't worth fixing it for. And my car, that took the kids to school each day, kept breaking down and [REDACTED] fire. And my car, that took our kids to school each day, kept breaking down and catching on fire. Again, he told us it was a waste of his money to fix it for us.

Thing were so bad I finally made the decision to leave Dick for good. He was going to kill someone if I didn't. I kept it to myself because I knew I'd have little to no support. My parents knew Dick was not providing for his family but chose to ignore once again. I kept my decision to myself because I knew I'd have little to no support. I started to secretly make plans.

Unfortunately, the best laid plans. Before I had gotten very far, another explosion from Dick. Dick had, unbeknownst to me, not worked, but drunk that day. He picked up the kids up from school intoxicated and came home only to drink more. An incredibly tense dinner was followed by an assault of our eldest daughter in the kitchen as they cleaned up. I, who was still feeding our youngest in the lounge, went into the kitchen and stepped in front of our daughter to protect her. I was also assaulted by Dick. Something inside me snapped. I gave the phone to my eldest and told her to get herself and the others out of the house and called the police. I was stuck inside with Dick. He had me trapped against the bench, screaming at me and threatening to punch my face in. I slapped him so I could escape. The police arrived, Dick was arrested, charged with assault and taken away in handcuffs.

The terror and confusion my children and I felt that night was really just the beginning. Little did I know I would be revictimized repetitively, not only by Dick but our police system and courts. This happened in mid-September 2012, what followed was more than a decade of threats, harassment, intimidation and stalking by Dick that still goes on today.

Released on bail, Dick went to my parent's house where he was welcomed and cared for. I, on the other hand was accused by my parents of being a vindictive wife because my husband left me. My father told me what we experienced was not an assault. I was shattered.

I'd spent years being isolated, abused and degraded. I did not have a cent to my name because everything I had was in the mortgage to counteract Dick's theft. I did not even have enough for a carton of milk. Now suddenly, I was expected to continue to stand up to Dicks manipulative abusive ways, required to be make rational, intelligent decisions, deal with police, and legal matters, all while caring for four frightened children all on my own.

Following Dicks arrest came days of begging for forgiveness and trying to win me back. When Dick realised, I was done, and it was over, slowly his pleas of undying love turn to threats of harm. He repeatedly broke his bail, sending blaming letters and calling to intimidate me. He repeatedly broke his bail, sending blaming letters and calling to intimidate me into dropping the charges. I couldn't even if I wanted too, the police charged Dick.

I was told by the police that Dick had a right to see his children, so we organised for them to meet and walk the dogs together. The first of dozens of misinformation and mistakes made by the police. Dick refused to see his oldest daughter, instead sending her a letter blaming her for his violence and the family's destruction. She was only fifteen at the time. A bail breach, seen and ignored by police.

Dick would confuse and scare the children during these walks. Telling them about animals he was killing and how he liked to kick a chicken where he was staying, he'd named after his eldest daughter. He'd bad mouthed me relentlessly and gave our eldest son a phone to secretly keep into contact. Undermining, me once again my relationship with my children. Dick used the threat of money over them. If they stayed with me, they'd live in poverty but with him they'd be showered with gifts. Dick was still managing to use this small window of opportunity open to him to manipulate, control and terrify his children.

I went to the police, concerned about the effect this was having on the children and Dicks continued interference within my home. The police insisted I apply for an intervention order. The officer in charge of DV helped me write out a court application and it was granted almost immediately.

The orders stopped Dicks visitation and really kicked off his vengeance spree. In short, Dick would climb onto the roof at night to spy on us. Damaging the roof while up there and glueing up the down pipe. This caused the gutters to overflow into the house damaging wiring and requiring a roof restoration. I could not call the police because he would see them coming and leave. The goal was to make me look mentally unstable.

We had an [REDACTED] pool that he vandalised to make it unusable. Something was put in the water, making it milk like, that could not be removed. When reported to the police, I was told it something must of blown over the fence and sent on my way.

Then came the hijacking of my email and the subsequent barrage of adult porn sites sending me photos. Worse was the gross dating site he signed me up to, stating I was up for anything and everything using my brand-new phone number. I went to report it to the police, who laughed and told me there was nothing I could do but close my social media down.

Then there's the car. It was in both our names and Dick refused to let me sell it to downsize and upgrade In the end it went to scrap. I managed to get a ridiculously high interest loan to get a new small car. Over the last twelve years I've had [REDACTED] screws in my back passenger tyre. What's the odds? The car that takes Dicks children to school [REDACTED] each day. Luckily, so far, it's only caused one car accident. How do you think his children felt when numerous times, we got a tyre screwed on his birthday.

Over the years I have reported them all to the police and have been not just ignored but vilified for wasting their time. Here just a few quote from police to me, "Find him a new girlfriend", "Stop stewing on it", "Nothing we can do", "Get over it" and most recently "Not interested in making a report on it".

Friends I made over the years were also targeted, scaring them off. One lady had her car vandalised [REDACTED] months. One, letting the air out of her tyre while parked in my driveway at mid-

day. When she reported the damage to the police, they agreed that it was Dick isolation tactics and commended for her strength of character. Again, I remind you I was humiliated and disrespected by the police for the same thing. Again, I remind you, I was humiliated and disrespected by the police for the same thing.

There is so much more and some of cruelty solely directed at his older children. Dick, because he helped set up my eldest son's iPod, he knew the password and lock him out of it rendering it useless. He sent the eldest son an email, believing them to have a great relationship. The child he punched, strangled and whipped with a belt. My son came to me and told me, "We got him". Dick was not allowed to contact his children. We took the email to the police because it was a clear breach. They told my son to email his father back, reminding him he was breaking the law. Putting the adult responsibility onto the child victim. In my children's minds the fault of no action taken by the police was mine failure to protect them.

The legal system was just as bad. We have a process that blames and chastises the victims, that adds to the overall indignity and distress that we suffer. What is the use of a victim coming forward to not recognise domestic violence as a punishable crime, unless he beats the hell out of you or kills you? My ex-husband has received no punishment or even recognition of his abuse.

I was put on trial not him. If I cried, I was mentally unfit. If I didn't cry, I was a cold-hearted manipulating bitch. Yet Dick was praised for going to a separation BBQ. I was belittled and blamed for not protecting my children from him. I was made to carry the guilt and shame. Why did I let him do that to our children? How am I copping? Why has her relationship with her parents broken down? Not once did anyone ask why Dick strangled his children?

If anyone else had done to our children what their father did, they would be in jail right now.

The courts required an independent lawyer be appointed for the children, who was not independent but pro dad and never actually spoke to the children involved. This lawyer was on the attack and made deceitful allegations about me, falsely muddying my name. I was unable to prove these accusations false, as pushing us quickly through the family courts seemed to be the top priority.

I had proof, my ex-husband was highly abusive and had started to physically harm our children. The court counsellor's report, a negative report from a violence prevention course Dick chose to do, letters from my children's [REDACTED] counsellor and the confession from himself when he was arrested for assaulting his daughter, all warned of my Dick's abusive ways. Even during court required supervised visits, it was reported that he told his youngest son he need to kick and punch women down. Still, he was given back shared care of his youngest two children, aged six and eleven (one whom he confessed to strangling). Placing my children and me in greater risk of further abuse.

During the court case my barrister advised me, there was no point fighting because until he puts them in hospital he will get shared care.

I was also harassed regularly by the police prosecutor to take the two youngest children off the intervention order. A minimum of once a month they called to bully me into changing the orders. They told me the family court will override the orders. I refused. These are the same police that insisted I take out the orders. The same police that gave me a duress phone for my house for two years, monitored 24/7 for our protection against who they believed was a highly dangerous man. The same police that told me to wear a necklace monitor even when in my own back yard hanging up laundry. The same police who sent around the Stay Home and Stay Safe organisation to update the safety measures of our house for our protection.

Confusing and destructive at the best. Which was Dick, dangerous or not?

To say life was stressful would be an understatement. We were still living in the wake of his destruction. I struggled to cope with four very hurt and angry children, as well as my own issues. I endlessly had to battle to keep my family safe.

The shared care arrangements that the courts insist on, allow him to continue to control and manipulate us. The older children had a choice on whether they saw their father. They chose not to. Dick had the younger two children every other weekend and some of the school holidays. They had endless junk food, soft drink and lollies. Dick took them on regular outing and holidays. They received gifts every visit and \$50 per dare, if they did what he wanted. They come home sick, badly burnt and one time, stitches in my daughter foot from stepping on a broken beer bottle. Emotionally we all struggle with these visits. Each time I left them I wonder if this will be the week he hurts them again.

I was linked up with a case manager from Centrecare who was a god send, but who could only really assist me with understanding how stupid and unjust our protective services and laws are. I also spent hours talking with Women's Legal services and Respect, hoping to receive any form of help or information they could offer.

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Emotionally we all struggle with these visits. Each time I left them I wonder if this will be the week he hurts them again. This further imploded the family dynamic with the older children feeling jealousy and anger toward the younger siblings for allowing themselves to be so obviously spoilt and manipulated by their father. The dinner table became a war zone; the lounge room a battlefield. I watched helplessly as what was left of my family crumble away.

For decades Dick paid less than [REDACTED] a month in child support by lying about his income. He's a subcontracting trades man. While he lavished gifts on himself and the younger children, I struggle to put food on the table. I took that battle to Centrelink but gave up when they reminded me smoking was addictive. Dick is a pack a day smoker. You do the maths. Child support, or lack of, was just another way for Dick to continue to abuse us but this time with government sanctions.

Dick enlisted the aid of his sister who regularly bombarded me with abusive phone calls. When that didn't work, she moved onto our eldest daughter threatening her, then youngest daughter. He also made a point of socialising with my parents while I was exiled.

After only just over a year of this turmoil, my eldest daughter, had a break down and move out to couch surf at friends' homes. She refuses to speak to me still, a decade on, blaming me for Dick's continued control in our lives and my lack of ability to protect us.

My eldest son scared me, he would seethe with anger and hatred, blaming me. He threatened me physically several times, once with a knife, then a hatchet and self-harmed on occasion. He treated me disrespectfully like his father did and called me the most horrendous names. He became the new abuser of the home. If you can't beat them, join them, attitude. I was advised by my psychologist and

Centrecare case worker that he had to be removed for our safety. I have not seen or spoken to my eldest son for the last nine years.

With just my youngest two at home, still visiting their father we tried to make the best of it. It was an endless cycle of terror. By this time the novelty of weekend fathering had worn off and the neglectful, violent man revealed himself again.

Neither child wanted to go anymore. My daughter was [REDACTED] and my son, [REDACTED]. They complained Dicks house was dirty, there was no food, clean clothes and he hurt the dog regularly. They were scared of him and constantly pleaded to be brought back home to me, which he ignored. Each visit I packed everything they might need including snacks, books, pencils and paper.

I took them to their own psychologist because it was getting harder and harder to make them go but legally, I was bound. With her support my daughter told her father she wasn't going anymore, much to her younger brother's horror. My son acted out at his father's house, hurting his sister repetitively in some weird attempt to bond with his father.

What followed was months of fresh intimidations, threats and vandalising. Dick would call and scream at her, texting me this was my doing. He'd pick them up from school and she would ask to be taken home to me. I'd get a demanding text to pick her up immediately. Dropping everything I'd head to the police station, (that's where hand-over took place for my safety, ha ha) and pick both children up. The kids were so terrified that my son slept in my bed with me and my daughter on a mattress at the foot of the bed. We stayed that way for over six months. Too frightened to be apart at night. .

One occasion he drove off with only our son and abandoned our daughter. I panicked when Dick called for me to pick them up from the station because they refused to stay with him, but only found our son there. I called the school in a state of pure frenzy believing Dick had harmed her. In force the teachers went out to search for her and luckily, she was found near the school.

Dick demanded mediation through Relationships Australia. I went knowing if I didn't it would be used against me at some stage. The mediator was so concerned for our safety that she gave me two weeks to get cameras installed outside my home and a panic room inside, before she let Dick know mediation was not possible because of his violent behaviour.

Things died down but Dick insisted our son must keep visiting him on his own, even though he was very verbal about not wanting to go with Dick, to anyone who would listen. Sending him alone was the hardest thing I ever done. He'd cry and beg me not to send him, but I had no chose. I could go to jail if I didn't then Dick would have them full time.

Early on, in his solo visits, my son had begged Dick to be taken home to me, and I was summoned to the police station yet again on short notice. My son was out the front, crying hysterically pleading to go home to me. I took him into the station so the police could see the state he was in. Instead of helping a fearful child, they accused me of manipulating him. I hadn't seen him since school drop off at 8:45am and it was then 4pm. They took him and our daughter into an interview room. Distressed, he again implored the officer not to have to go with his father. They sent him off with Dick still crying not to go. I was in shock and could barely move, feeling sick to my stomach.

For several years this went on. My son hated going. He'd get moody days before the visit, cry on the way to handover then pull himself together before seeing his father. Tears were not allowed at Dick's house. Every Friday he was picked up direct from school, my son would get sick before lunch and ask the teacher to call his mum to come get him. When it came to handing him back, my son would wrap his arms around me, conjoining to my waist and we'd walk that way to the car. Once in the car he'd

climb on me, and we'd sit embracing until he was ready to go home. Again, there was no food, it was dirty. He refused to shower there. Dick played violent movies and games in front of him and rambled on about conspiracy theories. Dick had cameras all over the outside and inside of his home. My son slept with a camera a few feet away from his face. But worst of all was Dick's violence toward the pet dog.

My son would tell me stories of sleeping on stranger's floor because his father was too drunk to drive. Dinners were verbally bashing me was the nights entertainment. Violent public outbursts where his father took people to tasks and holidays away were he slept with one eye open terrified of his father unpredictability.

My son came home after a one of these visits extra fearful because he saw his father had a [REDACTED]. Dick used to shoot animals in his youth as entertainment. I was told I must report it to the police as a duty of care. What followed was disgusting. The police went to his house to search it but not when I told them Dick would be there. They went back the next day after he had seen them on his cameras. Surprise no gun. I was then informed there was a gun registered to the property, then another officer told me it was someone else's gun, and a third officer told me there was no gun. Finally, a fourth officer told me it was ok for Dick to borrow a gun but not own one. Really. No sleep was to be had yet again.

All this time my son had continued to see his father, closing his ears and eye to the cruelty and abuse around him for me. My son knew if he didn't go that his father would come after me again. My son once told a doctor that he had considered suicide rather than going to his fathers but went to protect me.

By [REDACTED] at the age of ten, he'd spent the day with us, and we were preparing for him to go to his fathers. They were meant to head off on a camping holiday. In the morning, I packed for him and told him to get dressed. He refused. After much back and forth, I just didn't have the strength to send him anymore knowing how much he hated it and, how much it frightened him. But we all understood how dangerous it was going to be for us now.

I texted Dick to say he wasn't coming and so opened to door to the next round of intimidation, threats and manipulation. Terrifying does not cut it. I was sick with panic and worry. We all thought he would kill us. Dick insisted on speaking with his son over and over. Over and over, he yelled and screamed at him. Dick blamed everyone but himself for his children's decisions not to see him and I the biggest part.

After months of threatening calls and texts, Dick took us to court for breaching the orders. Ironic, really. I could go to jail.

He took us to court, again.

During the interim, I didn't send my son to school on the days his father was to pick up. I spoke with the school who were fully aware of my sons fear of his father and had previously on several instances reported Dick's behaviour to families SA. They were remarkably supportive of my actions. Then, worried he was missing too much school I sent him but picked him up early on visitation days. Dick soon got wise to this, and a chase was had through the school grounds, witnessed by all. My son would just no go with him.

Once again, we had to go through a series interviews together and apart with a court psychologist to make recommendation to the courts. Moving around the family courts from secure room to secure

room with a security guard escort in not for the faint hearted. Again, which was Dick, dangerous or not?

Both children clearly spoke how neither wanted to have anything to do with their father, just as the older children had said. The [REDACTED] recommend that it would be best for my son to face his father and tell him direct. It would lessen his fear of his father. He did so, placing adult responsibilities onto the child victim. He ran from the building in fear afterwards almost into traffic.

Still, Dick did not drop his case against me, he just fired his lawyer and stopped turning up to court. It took many more months and numerous court hearings with Dicks no-show before the judge would rule in my favour, even though that was the court psychologist recommendations to begin with. It also cost me thousands of dollars in court fees I have yet to pay off.

The hardest part to understand was the courts insisted that Dick had rights to have a copy of school photos and reports, hence giving him the tiniest loophole to keep abusing us. A man who still doesn't know how to spell his own child's name and has no idea of how old they are. This connection stops us from moving houses or schools. Leaving us sitting ducks until the next time he needs someone to blame for his own life failures.

Now twelve years on, with my family destroyed, friends gone out of fear and shunned by relatives, my two youngest children and I struggle to survive and stay positive. I have been diagnosed with complex PTSD and have been working with a psychologist for the last decade. I no longer work as a [REDACTED] designer but as a house cleaner. I don't feel safe anywhere. My hair has gone white and my bank balance dry. The courts in their wisdom not only allowed Dicks pitiful child support claim but gave me full financial responsibility for our four children.

A large piece of the puzzle that has been overlooked that over the last decade or so was that throughout this whole situation my children were never late for school. They were clean, dressed appropriately and has three meals a day. Homework was completed, their grades were good if not excellent and they were considered role model students. My children always got what they need but not always what they wanted. Bills were paid on time, and I never missed a mortgage payment. Even though we were stuck in the house the abuse took place, I managed to cosmetically change as much as I could to make it easier for the kids to stay there. I did this with my own two hands.

Both my eldest children have university degrees. My youngest daughter is just finishing off an [REDACTED] degree and my son will finishing high school next year and hopes to go to university too.

I did that and I accomplished it under the possible worst circumstances imaginable. Between police visits, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, case managers and court hearing. I tried to keep life as normal as I could while Dick continues his assault on us and roped in both his family and my own to relentlessly attack me. I helped my children as much as I knew how and took them to psychologist to assist where I couldn't. All while I spent days cleaning toilets so I could be there to drop them off and pick them up.

Still, Dick did not drop his case against me, he just fired his lawyer and stopped turning up to court. It took another [REDACTED] months and numerous court hearings of Dicks no-show before the judge would rule in my favour, even though that was the court psychologist recommendations. It also cost me thousands of dollars in court fees I have yet to pay off.

That the daily fear and paranoia we have felt for so long now, will never go away. I do not sleep well, listening and waking at the slightest sound that could be Dick on the roof again. The daily apprehension and tiredness due to the all the prolonged stresses, are overwhelming and suffocating, not allowing me to live a full and productive life.

I live with cameras guarding the outside of our home, a panic room and recently, a dash-cam on the car. All expenses I cannot afford. How do I move forward when I have to constantly watch my back.

I find myself becoming more and more agoraphobic, not wanting to leave the house except for work and the school run.

I have lost total faith in our police and courts

The courage it takes to leave an abusive relationship is monumental. Having lived through the process, I can say with absolute conviction it is highly flawed. When an abused person has found the courage to reach out for help, but is greeted with suspicion, accusations and indifference, something is very wrong. In short, we have a complete lack of care, responsibility and justice to the victims of domestic violence. In short, we have a complete lack of care, responsibility and justice to the victims of domestic violence. At a crucial time when we are scared, confused and vulnerable, we are let down, leaving us feeling even more hopeless, abandoned and abused than before, with an understanding that help is not really available or comes at a cost far too high. Even the strongest people would buckle under such pressure, let alone a victim of repeated cruelty and psychological destruction.

A few points.

Victims need to be heard and respected. Sometime the situations are far worse than it looks on the surface.

Police and courts need serious training. They need to be unbiased.

Family court needs to be stripped down and rebuilt to protect no just push cases through.

At the moment all aid services for DV are there just to guide you through the obscene perils of the family court. They really can't help at all.

Children need to be heard and protected. If a man abuses his wife, the chances of him harming his children are extremely high.

Education, education, education of our young.

Help build up girls' self-esteem and teach young boys' responsibility for their choices and actions.

Over the years, I have sent out letters and emails to people who can put a spotlight on these DV and family court laws that violate a victim's basic human rights to safety. But each time I get the same passing of the buck, that it is someone else's responsibility. It is every body's responsibility when it comes to the future of our children. We have the ability to change things for the better for families like mine and for the abusers also, please let's not waste it.

I am happy to discuss anything about my experiences and desperately hope what I went through will never happen to another woman or family.

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Below is a short story I wrote about the courts. My psychologist recommended I start writing to help process the extent of the abuse I've experience during my life. I think it sums up it up very well.

### Victimless crime

She stands alone, waiting to go into the court building. Fear engulfs her, causing the build-up of sweat gathered at the nape of her neck to dribble all the way down the centre of her back. The feeling so unnatural makes her shiver with uneasiness, tightening her already stressed body even further. She places her handbag onto the x-ray machine and watches as the guards closely inspect its contents for contraband. As she walks through the entrance, a tall, muscular, intimidating security officer stops her and insists she raises her arms so he can scan her for weapons. Yet she is the victim.

She waits at the security desk for another oversized officer to escort her through the building to a private, secure waiting room outside her assigned court chamber. Before moving, he asks her to describe the perpetrator he is protecting her from. She answers shakily, describing her husband. Scanning constantly as they move upstairs toward the court, vomit makes its way into her mouth, forced there by her disabling terror. The officer instructs her on how the room works and what to do in case of an emergency, then leaves her in a state of confused distress to await her lawyer in safety. Because she is the victim.

When finally, they make their way into the courtroom, she comes face to face with her abuser, who she has not seen for six months. Not since he held her trapped against a wall, screaming abuse at her and threatening to beat the living shit out of her, starting with her face. Not since he stole from her, humiliated and derogated her. Not since he destroyed her life, her family and left her isolated and alone. Because she is his victim.

That old, familiar feeling comes rushing back to her, nearly knocking her off her feet. Not now, she begs herself. She hopelessly tries to reject the unstoppable wave of traumatic flashbacks soaking up her mind like a sponge, leaving her feeling soggy and muddled. Her body starts to tremble uncontrollably, and her eyes well up as she fights to regain her composure. Her heart's pounding so loudly she can't hear properly. It's so strong and fast. It feels like it's about to beat out of her chest and run like she wishes she could do now. Because she is the victim.

She sits as far away from him as she possibly can without leaving the chamber. Her lawyer, all too familiar with the situation, is cold, calm and impervious to her client's monumental terror. This is just another day for the lawyer and just another case involving an overly trusting woman. They sit side by side, silently waiting for their turn to present before the judge.

His eyes, his hate-filled eyes, are all she can think about. The feeling of his crazed body dripping with disdain as he forced her against the kitchen bench, threatening to kill her. The smell of his hot, angry, alcohol-soaked breath spitting obscenities in her face. The horrible words and actions, so foul, he chose to perpetrate on them, his wife and children. An overwhelming fear surges back into her mind as she feels those same dead, despising eyes burning into her right now. Her brain starts spinning out of control like a broken record as she grips the chair to steady herself. Because she is the victim.

The time seems to drag on interminably. Her legs start to move involuntarily as the urgent need to pee overpowers her. She thinks she may actually wet her pants in fear. Unable to sit still, she fidgets

uncomfortably in her seat. Her legs are ablaze with tension, a stinging sensation of hundreds of little hot pokers pricking at her skin. Her sweat keeps amassing on her top lip, magnifying her terror for all to witness. She tries to wipe it away inconspicuously but only brings more unwanted attention to herself for her restlessness. Because she is the victim.

Desperately, she struggles to hide her apprehension, not wanting to show any weaknesses. She must not be seen as fragile or vulnerable, the two very things that define her right now. Panic is taking over her brain as well as her body and not allowing her to focus correctly. Her eyes are blurry, and her palms are damp. She fights to stay in control of her faculties and in the present moment. Because she is the victim.

The lawyers are called forwards, the case begins, and so does her new turmoil. She does not understand what is going on. It's all too fast and legally worded. She thinks she may have a case for whiplash, with her head rapidly snapping back and forth from one lawyer to the next. But no one is talking to her. No one asks her questions or opinions on how to handle matters. She sits, perched on the edge of her chair, enthusiastically waiting for something but not sure what. Because she is the victim.

Like the entrance's x-ray machine, the courts open up her life for inspection and review. They dig deep into every aspect and corner of her life. They poke, probe and unravel her choices. Picking away at the rotting remains of her marriage like vultures in a feeding frenzy. They pass unrealistic and unfair judgement on her with no evidence, just suppositions. Yet his life is taken at face value and left unchallenged. Her bewilderment escalates as allegations are hurled at her from every direction for every type of evil a woman could commit. Yet she is his victim.

While she is still trying to comprehend the insanity of what is happening around her, they move on to examine recent times. She sits emotionlessly while watching the courts put her abuser on a pedestal of rehabilitation because he attends an anger management class. She is dumbfounded, as they blatantly ignore the course provider's negative feedback on him. His violent crimes are to be overlooked for a man's preferred white knight suit in court. However, she is critiqued and mocked for how she is raising their scared, violated children. Children violated by him because they are his victims.

She realises very quickly that her mental health will be questioned if she cries. If she doesn't cry, they will accuse her of being a cold, stone-hearted bitch and he, the tolerant, understanding hard, done by father. She questions how she can possibly do the right thing in their eyes and realises she can't. She is blackened by their words and painted as a failure as a mother and a human being, while he gets a gold star and a free pass for just turning up. Yet she is the victim.

The lawyers talk over her, around her and through her, but never to her. The judge sits on high listening, questioning and commenting. Condemning her for allowing her husband to be violent and abusive towards their family. She sits speechless, dazed, wondering at what moment she became the villain? How did she become invisible? When did her life become a subject of ridicule and exploitation by others? Why are they so unwilling to listen to her and believe her? He committed the crime, and she is the victim.

She's devastated when she realises the courts treat her horrendous circumstances as just another number on the top of some case file notes. She is just another inane, inconsequential woman. Her body folds in on itself, unable to find the strength to keep upright anymore, knowing the abuse perpetrated on her and her children will be brushed aside as of no importance. A knot starts turning

over and over in her stomach as the reality of the legal system's misogynistic dysfunctionality hits home. Who will protect them if the courts won't? Because they are the victims.

Within a frighteningly short time, the case is held over to see the outcome of another charge he is facing. An arrest for assaulting his fifteen-year-old daughter. Giving him another chance to sidestep responsibility that she will never receive. By the end of the session, the understanding is that he will get shared custody of the children. Children, he has admitted to harming. Because he is the biological father, and they are just his victims.

On departing the courtroom, shocked and unable to think straight, her lawyer takes her back to the secure room to await her security escort. The lawyer insists it's going as well as expected, but that makes no sense to her. He was violent, stole, manipulated, and threatened, but she is on trial. She waits alone in shock. Devastated at the position the court has placed her in. How runs on repeat through her mind. The guard arrives and insists they wait a few minutes to ensure her husband has left before he safely walks her out. Because she is the victim.

On leaving, her bewilderment at what had just transpired makes walking difficult, as her legs have turned to jelly and her mind to mush. She sits down on a nearby bench, too confused to move. A dull ache takes over her body, emanating from her ravaged heart. Her mind is muffled, trapped in a thick, soup-like fog, unable to come to terms with the obscenity she was just subjected to. She naively thought the justice system was meant to protect the vulnerable. Because she is the victim.

She returns to her children, shrouded in disbelief, not knowing how to explain what has occurred. How can she help them process something so morally wrong and completely corrupt when she cannot understand it herself? How will she send young children to the abusive man she finally found the courage to leave? How will she make peace with this dangerous, unethical farce they are forced into living? How could she be persecuted by the courts for staying with this psychotic man and now be legally required to send young children back to him alone? Because they are the victims.

And thanks to our defective courts, we continue to be his victims.

The End

