

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

25th November to 10th December 2020



#notallviolenceisphysicalorvisible

I met him when I went to a club with some friends, he was there with a friend of mine, so he got my number and asked me out, that was how it started. My dad had always told me that I went for the wrong type of men, and this time I was trying to go for someone completely different. He was a lot older than me but I was really hopeful that it would work out.

The first date was great, he just made me laugh so much, it was brilliant. The next couple of dates were just the same. He would hold my hand, he put me on a pedestal, he made me feel like a princess, he was telling me how much he loved me and we got engaged after two weeks of knowing each other. He was telling me he had never felt like this before, that I was his soul mate, he was buying me flowers every week, it was just too good to be true. I did keep telling myself that it was too good to be true, but I am a positive person and there are good men out there. My mum and grandma always told me to go into any new relationship and don't treat it like your last one.

Everything was great, he had daughters that he saw, he said his previous relationship had ended, I had children as well, I just thought that we had so much in common. He even made an entry in my diary where he called himself 'husband', I wanted to settle down and be a family again so I thought all my dreams had come true.

However, just a couple of weeks in, it all changed, he started acting weird and then grabbed me by the throat, afterwards he was crying and said he was sorry. He told me that he had been abused by his ex-partner and I believed him, I had no reason not to. After that, it was alright for a bit but then he would make arguments about anything, early on in the relationship, when I was still feeling positive, I used to say he would make an argument about my little finger as a way of saying he made arguments over nothing. I had confidence and self-esteem then and I put his behaviour down to it being a 'man' thing, they can be grumpy and have mood swings. He used to hide my belongings and I would think I was going mad as I was sure I knew where I had put things, but then he would put the items back which made me think even more that I must be going mad.

He was still buying me flowers every week, he could be romantic, loving, he wouldn't let me carry shopping, it was amazing.

Some of the Red Flags:

He was too good to be true.
Blamed his ex for the breakup, saying she was abusive

Not all violence is physical or visible; control and manipulation is abuse too.



There was an occasion when I had told him I didn't want to continue with the relationship and he turned up at my mother's home on Christmas day. My mother didn't want to see him on his own on Christmas day so invited him to have Christmas dinner with us. I had been checking my phone as I was getting messages from friends, he snatched my phone off me but my family intervened and got my phone from him; this was quite early on in the relationship. I reported this to the Police and at the time, they made some comment that I shouldn't be with him, but I didn't listen, his explanations were so convincing. I didn't know at the time that my ex had outstanding warrants for domestic abuse offences, he had 6 previous partners that he had abused and had a history of using weapons; the Police didn't tell me this at the time.

Altogether, I was with him about 9 years and I got pregnant early on in the relationship which put more pressure on me to try and make it work. We did split up before I knew I was pregnant but he told me that it would change and I went back to him. All during my pregnancy, he didn't want to know me, he wasn't interested in me at all, I slept in a separate room, there was no intimacy or sexual contact at all.

After I had the baby, it was stressful as the baby wasn't sleeping and we took it in turns to look after him. There was an occasion when the health visitor came and my ex told her that I didn't know how to change a nappy! Bearing in mind, I already had two children, and he was still trying to tell me I didn't know how to change a nappy.

At this stage, I had never heard of narcissistic behaviour, or brainwashing, or 'gaslighting' and it came as a big shock to think someone could do this to me and be so 'fake', that he was a conman and a compulsive liar.

If I had known at the start that he would be like this, I wouldn't have gone into the relationship, and then I stayed because I kept wishing that person (how he was at the start) would come back. I also wanted to be in a loving relationship with a family around me, like I had with my ex-husband.

In the end, it was the exhaustion that made me split from him, I would try and get away and he would drag me back in the street, hitting me with padlocks, there was physical and emotional abuse, in the last year together he had sexually assaulted me, including rape, and it was just getting worse.

It finally ended when his behaviour got worse after he started taking drugs and drinking. There was an occasion when he was outside my house for hours with my son who he eventually passed to me through the window as I would not let my ex into the house. He had stolen my keys, my money, cigarettes etc. but he denied this. I reported it to the Police and they found him the next night and he was in my car! They removed him from my car and I just thought that I had had enough. There had been an incident over Christmas with the dogs that had upset my son who was screaming, I just thought, this just can't carry on.



After we separated, he carried on stalking and harassing me. He would write me letters, leave flowers at my door/on my car, it was just constant. I would change my phone number, but he would manage to get the new one – they are just so good at what they do. There were bail conditions in place, a non-molestation order, but he carried on, every day for two months. By then it was December and he quietened off for a bit then. I made twenty four 999 calls to the police, I think they failed me, they were not helpful at all. I was under pressure to move but I didn't think that was fair, I had all my support network where I was, including my family.

I stayed in that house for about a year but I had PTSD, and I was having nightmares and flashbacks. So, I decided, for me and my son, it would be best to have a fresh start and the Police helped with the move. It has helped me a lot to have moved. My ex doesn't have any contact with our son, he told the judge that issued the non-molestation order that he had 'moved on' from me but wanted contact with his son; the judge advised him how to try and arrange this. However, we have heard nothing, he has never tried to see his son. He did ring at the Christmas time saying he had a present for my son, I recorded the conversation. This was used as part of the Police case against him but when I heard from the Crown Prosecution Service recently, they are saying they only have 4 weeks' worth of evidence from the Police, despite the harassment lasting for a year.

I am angry, not just for me but all the other people out there; I lost a friend who killed herself because of the domestic abuse. This is why I want to make sure I get the message across about domestic abuse. That man stole nine years of my life that I can't get back. I couldn't tell people, I felt ashamed and humiliated.

The advice I would give to someone else if they found themselves in the same position I was in:

- Talk to a close friend or family member. I used to talk to my mum about all my relationships but I didn't with this one. If I had, they would have been able to see things that I couldn't see
- Don't feel, that if you keep going back to the relationship numerous times, that you can't tell somebody. It is how it happens, you just cling onto the hope that they will once again be the nice person that you met, but they don't change, they just get worse

Some of the things that helped me were having a support worker who brought me a book and told me to write everything down. This helped as I had a record of all the incidents that I had reported to the police. I also had an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advocate) support worker, that really helped. I did the Freedom programme and other group work – that helped. What helped me the most was the support from the specialist Police officers from the PVP team, (Protecting Vulnerable Persons). They really supported me; they were absolutely amazing. Even when I made mistakes and went to meet him, but then had to report an incident, they were very understanding and said that this is what happens. I have had some very negative experiences with the Police, I think some of them need totally re-educating. I also think that all the information about the incidents over the 9 years we were together, and the incidents for the 2 years after that should have all been taken into account by the Police.

