

## **My Story by ADH**

My ex ... where to begin? What to say? Why write this? (sigh)

We met, that is my ex and I, in 1991. It was just as I started what I thought was my dream position as a nursing auxiliary; and at the same time finding myself labelled with a disability. That disability being epilepsy.

The diagnosis is in fact, and let me be precise about it, "Temporal lobe epilepsy". Temporal lobe epilepsy is where there is a burst of "abnormal" and powerful electrical pulses, that are discharged from the temporal lobe region of the brain. The temporal lobe is to be located around the lower left and right halves of the brain, (I am no brain surgeon, or specialist, I simply see and saw scans: x-ray pictures of jelly grey matter and gently nod, while erstwhile and passionate doctor's; specialist's in this chosen, specific field, tell me that this is what it is.) and is, by the nature of the brains design, has a connection to the visual cortex, the senses, as well as the dream state; thus controlling both the inner visions and the outside visual world that any individual perceives.

As it is the temporal lobe that has a direct connection to our perception of reality. (or the external world, that we as individual's experience.) I have to admit that it is fair to say that the seizures I have experienced have had an impact upon my perception of reality.

In recent years, they have had an impact upon my mood, my ability to control my food intake, my short term memory and, not only how I visualise myself, but also how I have experienced or interpreted the external world internally. Epileptic sensations, or those that I experience prior to a seizure, include smells, such as oranges, or lavender, the sound of the sea rushing in my ears, hallucinations, such as faces in trees lumps of wood or flowers, even cars houses and food cans.

disorientation, giddiness and what I have termed “the jolts”, where I have muscular contractions, that start at about ten to twenty minutes apart, but get closer and closer and closer together, similar to an earthquake, until I fade into a comfortable darkness. Some exterior factors that pertain to an attack are huge bouts of anxiety, deep personal trauma or stress. The rush of adrenalin, caused by the flight of fight response, far too little sleep and over excessive amounts of sprit based alcohol.

Post seizure awakening has some factors too. My hair feels spiked like it is full of static and soft to the touch. Bruises to the face and cheeks are common. I had a black eye once. Also tongue lacerations, where I clamp down and take a chunk out of my tongue. I have also lost control of bodily functions. I also cannot drive. This has had a huge impact upon my confidence, as I have to think about public transport more than other’s; also being able to drive, or even ride a motorbike or even a moped has been a deep wish since my twenties. Perhaps, it has more to do with wanting something that I cannot have. I don’t know about that to be honest.

Having given a brief outline of this, it has to be said, debilitating condition; I now feel I ought to give a brief outline of who I was at that time and my early youth.

As a child, I was an unusually imaginative and from as young as I can recall, always preferred the dream state of consciousness, then being here in this tangible world; At school, both primary and secondary this preference towards the invisible led me to being isolated and rejected by a great many of my peers, some who tended to bully me a lot. This had an impact both upon my self-esteem, and my perception of the world around me and led me deeper and deeper into my own private world, where the story or the fantasy novel became evermore relevant against this waking world. This is also made me painfully shy, afraid of people generally and unable to maintain close personal friendship’s.

As I grew up I began experimenting with reality in different ways and this experimentation took me through narcotic, use hallucinogenic experimentation, music, and an awful lot of reading, usually science fiction or fantasy, and into Horror novels as well, as the end of these texts, with the negative ending, underpinned my experiences in the world that I visually perceived.

It was here between the ages of 16 and 24 that I made some of my closest friendships, both through a motorbike group and into a church that I became a member of. Maybe I am seeing this time in a more romantic way than it was; I just recall it well and as Just as happy as my early childhood, in a small village called Billingshurst in the 70's.

In truth many of those friends only know of a painfully shy child, who was riddled with self-doubt and anxiety. I know I tried to be like them and failed bitterly.

It has to be said here, there is a certain irony in the fact that Epilepsy helped me release myself from some of this pattern of fear and anxiety; and though this introversion is still a part of who am, I am not silent as I used to be. Perhaps recognising it has been half the battle. That aside, I am giving this preface to give insight into the person I was at 1991. The person I was in 1996, is little different to who I was then, but not much I have to say. The real changes took place after 96, because it was then that I lost a part of myself that has never returned.

There is not one of us on this planet, who likes to think of ourselves as selfish individuals. We all think that we do without for others, for the common good, without realising, that in truth, we are to some degree, simply being vain and lying to ourselves. This is seen clearly in our relationships, either with our friends, or our

close friends, with our intimate lovers, and those whom we are the most intimate of all: our family. For they see us for who we really are.

On many levels, as individuals, we tend not to see this as a fact. There are many reasons for it; some reasons are nested deep in our subconscious, some are on the surface. Nevertheless, though we are selfish, we are as a species capable of such kindness. We can and we have put other's before ourselves, in random acts of kindness with little or no knowledge of what we have done for that person. In English we call this "love". The ancient Greeks understood love and had five words for its complexities. In English there is only one term, and with that a host of emotions; from the spiritual to the emotional to the physical. The ironic thing about this short word with its complex connection is its etymology. For love is a term that relates back to the old English "lufu" a noun of Germanic origin that relates to the word to "leave" or "lief" and old English adverb for happy, therefore, when you say you love someone, you are stating in old terms that you're happy that they are leaving.

Love and selflessness and self-sacrifice for another individual, occurs because we want it to. For we choose to put that person before our own needs, our own desires and our own sense of self. The problem with this, as a lifestyle choice, is when it becomes a daily event and when it starts to dwindle because it is not being reciprocated. This is why I say we are inherently selfish, we give love because we want to receive love. At the beginning of any relationship this is fine because the emotion is reciprocated. In some cases, though, what starts off as an almost spiritual experience between two people, can slowly, overtime, devolve into a daily grind. Therefore, it is vital that effort is maintained -from both parties- to keep the unity of that relationship going.

This is because relationships, whatever the gender, are binary. They involve two people, working together, to protect and sustain each other; moreover, if through that binary relationship, the seeds of that relationship- children- arise; (whether through accident or design) then the binary notion of mutual aid and support, should secure this relationship together. However, if one person in that relationship, ceases to support the other, then decay sets in.

This is made even more complex by the nature of our own personalities. If one person in a relationship has a dominant personality over another and knows that the other person is weaker; then the dominant individual, gender aside, will seek to control through language and or the use of para-language (the language of gestures) the relationship from their perspective; in doing so, they become increasingly dominant and from this position take over the other person. My naivety about this, led me into the arms of a person whom both physically and mentally abused me for four of our six years together. In writing this down, I hope to remove not so much remove the past -after all that is impossible- I simply hope to exorcise this toxic person whom still haunts my dreams and my near waking state. Moreover, I hope to help people see their way out of an abusive relationship, if that person is in one.

To those men and women who are experiencing trauma in a relationship: you are not alone. I hope that this brief life-blog might help you to realise that. I also say this: Talk to someone. Anyone. being true to yourself must come before all other notions; for your health is at stake, both emotionally and if it goes to the next step physically; and there will be impact if you don't. In this closing address of the first part of this experience, I admit this is written from my perspective; which I know makes the reading weak and one sided. I have to state fully I admit to that.

However, I cannot get inside my ex's head and furthermore, I really wouldn't want to.

Abuse, whether it is physical or mental, occurs throughout society, on every level of the social spectrum. It occurs against any gender at any time and has, it has to be said, nothing to do with real relationships at all. It has to do with power. Power control and domination; therefore, if one person can control and or dominate another, moreover, manipulate another: then that person is abusive. This manipulation, also comes in stages. I found it didn't happen all at once, it began creeping in like a sickness, a malady that infected both of us.

My ex was grounded in true Northern grit. That is not to say I am detrimental to that. In fact, I was deeply attracted to it. She also had a great black sense of humour and we linked on a lot of issues, political issues especially; so it was a mutual and natural bonding, that should have ended in tears. Not violence. It became violent because I made a decision and stood against her on a position that I felt, at that time I could not achieve. Essentially I was scared to make a change in my life and that fear, led to many arguments. It was these arguments that were very one sided, and that led to her wanting to dominate and to a greater and greater degree control me, and in many ways, prior to that point, I let her, without actually knowing I had.

It is here that I have to be honest too. Up to that point, I had very few relationships. There were many I loved from afar and had crushes on, but felt too scared to talk to, in case I was rejected, and that fear: - rejection; has held me back from making many decisions in my life. When relationships occurred, the women I ended up with -on the whole- either became bored with me, and said bye or became

verbally violent, because I genuinely lacked then -and now as the issue is still there, the fear is still there- the ability to be decisive. This indecision can be considered as weak in the eyes of some, who consider power and domination key to maintaining a long standing relationship. So when I say, I gave up a lot to enter into a long standing relationship with her. (six years is the equivalent of a secondary education) it is true. I gave up meat, because she was a vegetarian, and there was no meat allowed in the house. Tofu became the protein food of choice. For those who like Tofu fine, I simply had a hard time making it taste like anything. Then there was the milk. Not skimmed milk or fat milk. But fat free long life UHT milk. From music to art to beliefs about God, I had to remove them all. Then after a time, there were words that I was not allowed to say, clothes that I had to wear and things that I had to do. So yes, I changed my personality a lot so we could work and live together. I did this because at the time I didn't know any different; I also believed I "loved" her.

We, my ex and I, first moved into nursing accommodation and then a house, before we both decided to get a mortgage. The maisonette rested on the outskirts of Bridgeton. It was a pale painted one-bedroom upper story flat, with a narrow, cabin kitchen a large bedroom and lounge a combi bath and shower a side cupboard in the lounge for the tumble dryer. In relation to the property, what personally won me over was the view from the bedroom window. For it looked out over - at that time- a ripe golden wheat field, that had lines of oak trees that ran up either side of the field and into the middle distance. I have to say, for me, it was perfect. The mortgage rate was also low, money was good, we had cats, I felt that things were fine; and it was for six weeks. However, it was after we moved into the flat that things became difficult between us.

My ex, had quit her position as an auxiliary and had passed an access course into higher education. From here she managed to get a position in social services. It was from here, that her words resonated in my ears. Words like "I am running, you have to catch up" or "I can't stay here in this anymore, you have to change." phrases like this, at the time, meant little or nothing to me. From my perspective, I simply couldn't simply leave my job. Besides, there was little money coming in from her side, as she had, according to her, taken a reduction in pay for the position. Why would she lie?

Then the arguments began in bed. I would say something, about the government, and this would be seen as "polemic" or one sided. I would counter argue and she would say "I was wrong" violently pushing me away. On the whole our arguments became increasingly painful and involved being personally demeaned. Once, over one issue, that I simply cannot recall, she hit me for the first time. After this I left, then called her, only to go home because she was crying and we would resolve the issue and so it went on. I recall one particular night after a very painful difficult argument, where I was hit again, and I stormed out -again- only this time I walked the ½ mile into Bridgeton town centre. I recall looking at the bandstand and the shops around under the orange lights, that surrounded me. It was I think October 95 and the first time I genuinely considered leaving her. With that arose the fear that I would be homeless; I felt I wanted to call and talk to my parents, but at the same time I felt ashamed that at 27 or 28 years of age, I had let them down. Feelings like this raged inside me. I was too proud, too guilt ridden, ashamed to face what was happening and too scared to leave her; so I kept returning to days of almost happiness and weeks of vile verbal abuse and cruelty.

It reached the point in 96 where I could see that things were not going to get



better. They were getting worse. I found myself being beaten up, three out of the four days when she was home, or I was not on night duty cover. My back was riddled with bruises as were my upper arms, and when I defended myself, she screamed at me to hit her. But I didn't. I pulled back, and bowed my head, while covering my arms to defend myself as she repeatedly hit me around the head over and over again.

It was after a particularly painful week that I decided to contact "relate". Many people understand relate as a marriage guidance counselling service, but it also support's those who are in common law relationships, find a place to negotiate a position of grounding. It was during this single session with a relate counsellor that I knew any hope of making this relationship "work" was over. The counsellor asked me what the problem was, and I said, "...well I do everything: cooking, cleaning ironing housework everything and she does nothing." The counsellor turned to my ex and asked "What do think is wrong with this relationship" at which point my ex replied: "nothing at all". It was at this point I should have left. But even then I didn't, because by then I was too afraid of her.

I recall that on the way home that night how I sat in terror in our tan ford fiesta. She said: "You made me out to be a bitch" at which point I replied, "well you are...sometimes you are." The words came from me nervously. From here, things became worse until as I finally exploded "WE DON'T HAVE A RELATIONSHIP! WE HAVE A DICTATORSHIP! YOU TELL ME WHAT TO DO, AND I AM TOO STUPID OR TOO SACRED OF YOU TO SAY NO!" At which point she cried and stormed out of the bedroom and when that didn't work, which was in real terms, as I recall, the first time I stood up to her, she shouted at me from the living room hurling vicious abuse and violent threats. I didn't sleep that night at all. I was terrified to do

so.

The tragedy about all of this, is that so many people we knew, as friends or colleagues, knew what was going on, yet never said anything to my face. Both my Mum, now passed two years; and my sister didn't like my ex. They called her a manipulating individual. Yet never spoke to me about it. What they didn't know, because I didn't tell them, was how violent, or how terrified I was by the end of it. I couldn't stay in the house without the fear of her coming through the front door. Or go home without the fear of what I was going to face. At the time, no one knew that. They all knew we were going through a "rough patch" I recall conversations with Ex colleagues, people she stayed in contact with even though my ex, had changed her employment position, who told me, after I had gone home how useless I was as a person, behind my back. It also has to be said that some of these people also cheered gladly when she turned up at my place of employment the morning I left, screaming and demanding where I was because I had finally "left her!"

So we reach the end of this experience. How did I leave? I would like to say that I finally got up the courage, put my pride aside, and went home to my parent's. But it wasn't like that. It ended when I met someone else. This person collapsed in a local bar. I, with her parent's support, took her to Bridgton's accident and Emergency unit and stayed with her until she came around. I called the maisonette and explained to the ex the situation. Who I remember was pleased that I called. I then met this person again a week later, after she was discharged from hospital. We then started talking about why and how we met. To this day I genuinely don't know why I spoke to her, but I did. I told her everything and explained "the problem." At which point I broke down and cried.

It was this person, who, was only in my life for a week or two, it has to be said, and who despite her own personal problems, gave me the strength to leave my ex; while at the same time, I gave her the mutual strength to carry on. I am indebted to this person more than any other. Another thing happened that day, that I have yet to fully understand. For somehow, on the day I got that courage up to finally leave my ex, she knew I was coming back to the flat; because after I packed my suitcase, the door burst open at the bottom of the stairs and she bellowed up at me "I've got you now". The words chilled me to the bone. I recall how she barged past me and through stuff about the flat. I cowered and became so scared I was transfixed to the spot. I have only found out recently that fear tends to freeze people, people don't run. They simply stand there in shock. Which was what I was experiencing. What followed must have only been about five minutes in duration, though it felt like a terrifying hour, of both verbal and physical abuse.

She pushed me back and went for my face. I managed to cover myself, but not before I sustained lacerations to my cheeks and gum line; when she attempted to scratch at my mouth. As I bent low to defend myself, I sustained scratches to my neck and side, as I was repeatedly struck over and over again. Despite my fear, I had to physically keep her away, while I was trying to get my case out of the door. At this point, she stood there. Her face red with rage. Her eyes filled with hate and venom. She stood there, spitting at me. Boasting of the men she had fucked behind my back and how I was weak, feeble and useless. Finally, I wrestled myself out of the way, and as this happened she then with her back to me, charged into the kitchenette; at which point I fled down the stairs never to enter that place again.

I would like to say that this was the end of it. But it wasn't. We met me at a pub three weeks later and after saying I was planning to go back to church, she ex-

attempted to glass me. Two weeks later, after finding a rented room, I went home to my parents and faced my father, who was furious. He then went to see my ex and came home an hour later saying “he didn’t want me in that house ever again.” To this day, I do not know what was spoken between them, other than my father believing that my ex was “deranged”. Within three months she had organised my name to be taken off the mortgage, and with that any legal right I had to the sale of the property.

Then of course came the emotional repercussions. Because I was free. I don’t recall 97-8-9 at all well. It was about this time that I caused damage to work property and lost my position in that job after a bout of severe drunkenness, that I am deeply embarrassed about to this day. There were new people around and a moment, when someone else came along. I recall washing her feet with tears; after which I had a complete emotional and mental collapse. The diagnosis is now defined as PTSD. From here I had to be nursed through counselling and prayer to find a place of strength from which start again. Which I have. Since then, I have tried to put all of this behind me. I have moved on. In 2004 I met a beautiful person who I am amazed to say became my wife. We have one son, whom I am proud to be a stepfather, and three beautiful daughters’. My epilepsy has balanced out after a huge seizure that has permanently damaged my short term memory and despite being diagnosed as dyslexic, I have gained an honours degree in English language and literature, as well as a high Ed diploma in creative writing. I still dream a lot, but I write the dreams out now. There is a lot to be said for 21<sup>st</sup> Century communicating.

Finally, if you are in a relationship, like the one I have described above, you must talk to people. You must reach out to friends and family, for they will be there for you. Don’t be too proud to admit that you are in a painful situation, also,

understand that this situation is not your fault. People like my ex, they like to be in control and like they like the sense of authority they have over you. If you challenge them, they really don't like it and they will use a hundreds of words to justify their response. What matters is you. Also please understand that you are not alone, there are many, many, people like you in this situation. You don't have to suffer in silence.

Finally, (a sigh) and how did this start to resurface? To start with, I found myself on Facebook, (somewhat normal in this day and age) looking at storm washed lighthouses. Lighthouses lead me to think about the song "lifted" by *the Lighthouse family*. A song that is both beautiful but painful. as it brings back this difficult time. Then there has been the recent allegation against a certain female - now deceased- liverpudlian comic, whose life with a musician has been brought to the surface.

In response to that I can state that my ex is still, to the best of my knowledge, alive somewhere. It is -if anything- a memory that haunts me, for her ghost seldom leaves. I am hoping, by writing it down, this is finally the end of it and I can now finally move on. Then, there is, what has come out of writing it, the catharsis and of course hindsight.

While writing this, I have been reflecting, upon what should I have done, when should I have done it. Hundreds of questions about my character -or lack of it- ripple to the surface in ugly waves. In response to that, I say armed with the knowledge of hindsight, we easily say, "if only I did this, or if only I did that." What hindsight doesn't give a person is the means to deal with the present. For the present is where we all live. In that chaos of those latter years of living with my ex, it has to be said, half of the time I didn't know what to do, because I didn't know how to talk about

what I was experiencing; that is because mental and physical abuse is painful, hard and difficult to face.

In many ways, the subject of mental and physical abuse within the home, and from a female to a male, is a taboo subject. It leads many to consider that the man is too weak; that he has no strength of character. I pride myself, in the knowledge that despite it all, despite the personal threats, the emotional verbal and physical attacks, and there were many, I only raised my hand once and never followed through; while she laughed and hit me again and again and again.

Now, as then, after our parting, I genuinely bare her no ill will. I do not love her. That died ago; if it existed at all. But neither do I hate her. In fact, I forgive her and end my days here peaceful in the knowledge of doing so.

Finally, and I know I have said it already, but I am underlining it If you know of anyone who is in this situation, be a light house. Talk to them because they need someone to listen to and if you can't do that, then go to the police; because the police are there to help. Please be a light in another's darkness, talk about it and help them free themselves from pain. For even though there are many relationships that thrive on it, on the whole the victim is looking for a way to be free.