

Anthony's Story

I met Helen when I was in my mid-twenties. I was just starting out on my career as an academic and she was still a student. She was attractive, intelligent, a little shy but fun.

I remember quite early on in our relationship she hit me on the nose in response to something I said which she didn't like. I was shocked. I was brought up not to hit anyone, especially women. Looking back, that was a sign of what was to come, but I would never have believed just how bad things would get.

I made allowances for her because I knew she had had an abusive childhood and had no support from her family. I felt obligated to help her and even though I didn't earn much money I supported her through her studies.

Over time she gradually distanced me from my family and friends. She was always charming with other people but behind closed doors it was a different story. Whenever I wanted to meet up with friends or family, she would make such a fuss that I began to see them less and less.

The violence increased incrementally. She would erupt for the smallest reason and sometimes for no reason at all. Coming home from work some days I would sense the simmering atmosphere as soon as I opened the front door. She attacked me with whatever came to hand: a rolling pin; a screwdriver; a spirit level; cutlery; crockery. When she cut my wrist with a kitchen knife I had to go to A&E but I lied saying it was the result of a DIY accident.

I constantly protected her and convinced myself that if I showed her that I loved her enough, she would change. It seems foolish now, but I thought if I married her things might get better.

Of course, they didn't.

She locked me out of the house on several occasions and I had to sleep in the car on freezing winter nights. She cut up all my work clothes and threw them out of the bedroom window.

One day she woke me up in middle of night because she had had a bad dream and hit me in the face with the stiletto heel of her shoe. On hearing the commotion, a neighbour called the police who came to the house and separated us. Even though I had blood pouring down my cheek and she didn't have a mark on her, it was she who was given a leaflet for victims of domestic violence.

She once beat me so badly with the tube of a vacuum cleaner that it was impossible to see the flesh colour of my back. On another occasion when I was leaving the house, she threw a heavy ornament through the back windscreen of my car. I drove straight to the police station. I was told by a police officer that if I pressed charges against her that would be the end of our relationship, and so I didn't.

But gradually I realised that I didn't need to protect her any longer. When she smashed a mug on the back of my head leaving a deep cut, I again went to A&E. This time I told them exactly what happened. The nurse laughed and replied by saying, 'I hope it wasn't your best china!'

Fortunately, now there is a much better understanding that men can be victims of domestic violence but twenty years ago all too often it was still considered a laughing matter.

Over time, I became more and more desperate. Deep down I knew I couldn't change her. I also knew I couldn't go on like that.

One day we had an argument and she demanded that I leave the house. I simply said yes. I had no energy left to fight any more. We had been together for seven years.

We agreed to a 3-month separation but as soon as I shared what had been happening with my family and close friends, I knew there was no going back.

She didn't take it well when I told her but eventually she agreed to a divorce. I ended up giving almost everything to her. But I didn't care, I just wanted to be free. Thankfully we had no children.

After the divorce I was single for six years. I wasn't ready for another relationship. I needed to heal. I wrote a novel *Indelible Scars* about a male victim of domestic abuse. While it was a work of fiction it included many events that actually happened to me. It was a deeply cathartic process.

I have since remarried and have 3 wonderful children. I am thankful every day to be in a loving, mutually respectful relationship.

Should I have left earlier? Yes, definitely. When I told my new wife what I had been through she cried and told me she couldn't believe someone could do that to me. She told me I never deserved to be treated like that.

And that's the truth. I didn't deserve it. No one does.