



Abuse, Support & the 'System' - Part One

I was abused.

There. I said it. I'm stating it publicly.

And yet, in some ways it still seems to be not the right word. Oh, it is. But words have connotations. These come from society and your personal experiences. Connotations of words can differ from person to person. There are no definite connotations or they would probably become symbolic.

So for me, and I bet actually many other people who read this, the phrase "I was abused" conjures up images of a young child being sexually abused. This is not what happened to me. I can't even imagine the horrors of having that happening.

However, I was abused. I was abused emotionally, physically and now I think about it, sexually. The abuser is my husband. I say "is": again those connotations. I escaped (and yes that is exactly the right word) just over four years ago and am now happily in a wonderful relationship with the most understanding and supportive man. The abuser is still my husband though.

Why? I can't afford the divorce. He wouldn't sign and return the papers and I was left with the only option of paying £100 for a baliff to visit him. Oh and there was the issue of him getting kicked out of places he was living and often not having the address he was at. Nothing could be done then. That's the first problem with the "system". A woman who has been abused has yet another real battle just to get divorced. So he the abuser, gets to hold onto me still in someway. He can tell everyone that I am his wife and despite the rarity of this in his speech, he is telling the truth.

Anyway, I digress slightly. I should have recognised the signs early on and ran far, far away. Although, I can't really think that would have been the right course of action because then I wouldn't have my two beautiful children. I think it is fair to say that I grew up early but there was an area of naivety and vulnerability about me because I had a self esteem issue. I know where this stems from. Exactly the same sort of scenario as I am discussing now but a generation ago. A father who reduced my mum to feeling worthless. It is a separate blog post but I'm sure you can see the connection.

Alcohol showed some of its cards early. He drank. He became aggressive. I remember of couple nights on the town. One where he went to the toilet and I was waiting outside. I civilly and politely chatted to the bouncer. Me bad. And look at that, me, the victim in this, still trying to justify my actions so as not to be blamed. How I spoke doesn't make any difference! The point is all I did was chat to someone whilst I waited. It was enough to set him off into a rage. I remember walking up the road with him accusing me of all sorts and deciding that anyone who walked passed us deserved attacking. I might look at that innocent guy walking by or he might look at me. He was angry. He needed to fight. I placed myself in the middle and stopped anyone getting hurt. It was the alcohol. It made him angry.



Another time, New Year's Eve to be precise. At the end of the night there was the usual crush to get to the cloakroom and out the door. I was happy to queue up and chill. He did not want to behave this way. I know we argued and I know he grabbed me in some threatening way. The part I vividly remember was the concern on the faces of the two girls in front of us and the one girl being brave enough to check I was okay. I reassured her it was fine (?!), that I knew he wouldn't take it any further. It was just the drink.

I didn't worry about the drink. He made it clear to me that it was what everyone did. It was "normal". Everyone sat down to a few tins in the evening. With a background of family life that included alcoholics and later on tea totalers due to the damage caused by alcohol, it was a fair point that I would hardly know what was "normal".

I was pregnant with our first child. It was fine. We had planned to have this child together and he would mature and enter a new phase of life. He'd promised. I was forgetting that he was actually 9 years my senior and should have therefore made that transition already. Zoom forward a few months. Pregnancy did not suit me. I was unwell. I was heavily pregnant and suffering with my asthma and breathing difficulties and yet I was struggling to walk up to and back from the local shop to get him his cigarettes and alcohol. I honestly do not remember why but I know there was a reason. There are too many droplets of memories for them all to remain in the pool; some just overflow and soak away. But I know there was a reason. The most likely explanation was that he was laid up with his bad back or was at work until after the shop closed and my life would be made unbearable if I didn't. The droplet of memory that remains is the exhaustion and overwhelming sadness as I struggled back with the heavy carrier bag wondering what on earth was going on, what on earth I had done to be living like this. Clearly the idea that a man who looked after his pregnant wife and fussed over what she did was just another piece of crap fed to young girls. Don't worry, I have re-learnt that these men do exist.

Every evening would be the same conversation: "I could go into labour any day now. You need to make sure you're not drinking so you can drive me to the hospital" (I couldn't drive myself if I wanted to as I did not have a license). Always the reply of promises. I was induced the day after my due date as my health deteriorated. My son arrived late in the evening so the husband got to see us settled on the ward before going home. Of course he would return and visit first thing in the morning to see his first born child. He did. Around lunchtime. That makes me want to cry right now. Another droplet: looking around the ward at all the other happy parents and family units and me being on my own with my baby in an incubator to keep him warm. When he did show, it was obvious. It had been a heavy night.

I returned to work part time when my baby was 5 weeks old. My wages added up to his spending on alcohol and cigarettes. I told him I wasn't going back to work for that. But it continued.

What is important to note here, and is impossible to get across accurately, is that the decline is gradual. One day to the next, the change is too miniscule to detect. There is a difference when you compare year on year but that's not what I tended to spend time doing: sitting down and thinking now how does my life in this moment compare to it in such and such moment. You just don't recognise how bad things have become as it has crept up on you. It hasn't pounced or



shouted. Just slowly, quietly, deceptively crept.

As time moved on, I recognised he was an alcoholic. One time I even got him to admit it. I contacted A.A. He went to one meeting and decided it wasn't for him. Time continued. I spotted a dream house but it would financially be a stretch. It was the incentive he needed. He wanted to move to a house of his dreams

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Despite me believing I am completely over all this, it has led me to cry my eyes out. The suffocating balloon of anxiety in my chest which finally deflated nearly two years ago, suddenly reinflated. I was wrong to think I had popped it. I will continue this story of mine at some point as it is far too important to leave. There are too many vital points that I need to get across regarding supporting victims and how the system works for me to just leave it. So I have entitled it "part one". I will not just let it sit in my drafts unseen after what writing it has put me through.

Most of all, I am learning as I write. It has surprised me that it is the small things that have upset me the most: those that involve my children; the emotional abuse that belittled me; how slowly it happened but how big the change was; how even early on in that marriage I was reduced beyond recognition to the person I am now. Mostly, how I did not even really consider the emotional abuse as the worst or criminal. My focus had been on the violence that had appeared later and now I am faced with recognising how much worse it actually was.

So I am publishing this as it is, without checking for errors I'm afraid as I'm not in a position to read through it and be okay. At this point, I hope at least it gives people a little insight to how it can happen, how those little droplets can be the deadliest poison and how even the divorce process needs looking at, not just the police.

This post was first published [here](#) - thanks to author for permission to cross post.

Part Two of this series can be found [here](#).

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