

The First Cut Is The Deepest

Lisa (38)

I grew up in suburbia, went to an Anglican Girls School and had never had a serious relationship with a guy. I had thought my lack of interest in boys was due to “immaturity” - the idea of being a lesbian never crossed my mind!

Two school friends and I used to go out and see bands together all the time. They were wild and fun but were more interested in sleeping with the band than listening to music! I met Kim at a gig when I was 18 and she was 20. She approached me as I was trying to ignore the behaviour of my friends. Kim said that she had seen me at other bands. We clicked straight away, and when she suggested we go and see a band together I said I'd love to.

We made arrangements and the following week we saw a great band, had a brilliant night and, later hit Oxford Street – for my first time. I LOVED it – it felt so “free”. The more we drank, the better time I was having – she was so nice and we had SO MUCH in common. Later that night she told me that she was recovering from a very difficult break up and she was still heart broken. As I listened to her story my heart broke for her, she was such a great person. A little later she told me the relationship had been with a girl...I wasn't shocked. However, at that moment I thought, “she is the sort of person I would like to go out with. But she's a girl!” I realized why I had never “connected” with boys. The more time we spent together the greater my attraction to her grew. We connected in a way that I never had with anyone else. She enchanted me and I was falling in love. Finally one night we kissed and it was on.

Kim told me her mother had sent her to a psychologist when she came out and said that no one could know about us – they'd try to break us up. I believed her. Also I thought our relationships was too “special” to share with the world. No one else would understand what we had! She told me how special and gorgeous I was; bought me presents and we had fun together. I had never been so happy. After 3 months we moved in together. It seemed the right thing to do, however this is when the cracks started to appear.

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One night we were out seeing a band and I was having a great time. I turned around to find Kim wasn't anywhere to be seen. I thought she must have gone to the toilet or bar so didn't worry, but the gig ended and there was still no sign of her. I went outside to find her with a furious expression on her face. At first I thought she'd seen her ex-girlfriend but I soon worked out that she was mad with me. She kept saying that maybe we should call it quits – as I wasn't ready to commit to a relationship. I was devastated. She kept accusing me of trying to come on to a guy on the dance floor. It took hours of me saying sorry and telling her how much I loved her for her to get over this 'hiccup'. But I was left rattled.

During the next six months this sort of thing happened regularly, and I began to change my behaviour to prevent it. I didn't talk to anyone except friends when we were out and I gave Kim 110% of my attention. I kept thinking that she just needed to see that I wasn't like her ex-girlfriend and things would be okay. But no matter what I did the jealous episodes continued. I began to think of them as proof of how much she loved me and how much her ex had hurt her.

We wanted to spend all our time together so we both quit our jobs. I thought this would be a great opportunity to prove how committed I was. We spent 24/7 together; going out all night and sleeping all day! Mum had made it clear that she didn't like Kim, even without knowing we were together. Kim told me that my mother would never accept us, and that she would try to break us up so I saw less and less of my family. It hurt, but Kim was the most important thing in the world.

I'd lost contact with my friends, I wasn't working – and still the jealous rages continued. I was baffled. Eventually I got bored and wanted to work so we both got new jobs. After a few weeks Kim quit hers; she said she hated it and would find another job – she never did. She took over control of 'our' money (ie. my salary) and started calling me at work all the time. We often argued about money - particularly when I wanted some for myself. Every day she would make my lunch, drive into the city, pick me up and we would have lunch together in the park. I couldn't ever have lunch with my work colleagues.

Over the two years we were together, my confidence with people disappeared. All my energy was spent on keeping her happy and I desperately missed seeing my family. While we continued to have great nights out I was miserable and felt like I was continually walking on eggshells. She held my self-esteem in the palm of her hand. If she was happy so was I, if she wasn't I tried to 'fix' it. Eventually she left me for someone else - I was crushed. I felt unable to function without her. It was a very dark time of my life.

It wasn't until many years later, that a counsellor described my experience as domestic violence. I nearly fell off my chair: Me? A victim of domestic violence? Couldn't be! However, the more aware I've become about domestic violence, I realize that my relationship with Kim was abusive - emotionally, psychologically, financially and spiritually. That relationship ended nearly 20 years ago, my relationship with my family has healed and I am in a loving and respectful relationship – life is good. I now thank God she dumped me; I hate to think where I'd be now if she hadn't!

Terrified To Go Home

David (27)

I met Anthony through work when I was 22. The relationship seemed okay in the beginning, but in hindsight, there were warning signs of what was to come. They were little things at first: coming over unannounced; showing up unexpectedly when I was out with my friends; phone calls that seemed to be a little too frequent. I made the mistake of interpreting these early signs as strong romantic interest. Before long he had moved in with me and his behaviour had become obsessive and controlling.

Anthony was really threatened by my friends and my social life. He hated that other guys would look at me, or that I'd slept with other guys around our neighbourhood, even that I had quite a lot of friends who he felt "competed" with him. Tiny things that had not even occurred to me as being possibly offensive would cause enormous rage. The more I was attacked, the more and more I withdrew. It was a self-defence mechanism – I figured if I could stay away from anything that might cause him to get upset then that would keep him calm. That didn't work of course – he simply found new things to be insecure about. I realise now the whole strategy was to keep me feeling perpetually blamed, inadequate and not doing enough to keep the relationship together. I isolated myself from my friends, my family and from everything that I used to enjoy doing. To get me away from my previous life, friends and sex partners we moved to a different city where I knew no one except him.

I was by nature a very happy, outgoing person, but I quickly became cautious and scared all the time. My fear escalated when the physical violence began. The first time was because he had seen me talking to someone I'd had a fling with in the past and he punched me in the face because of it. From that time on, even though the physical violence was occasional, the fear of it happening pervaded my life and he would threaten me with it often. Punching, pushing, restricting my physical movements (like blocking doors if I was trying to leave a heated situation), destroying or giving away my property and refusing to take care of me if I was sick were punishments that would be meted out when simply threatening me or humiliating me in public wasn't enough.

Anthony was from a racial minority. One of the most confusing things was being told that the violence was part of his "culture" and the fact that I had a problem with it meant that I was racist. The problem according to him was not the violence – it was the fact that my racism meant I couldn't accept who he was. It was me

not him that had to change. I now understand that violence is not culture – there is no ethnic group on the planet that celebrates partner abuse as a cultural identity.

Apart from my massive social withdrawal, the affect on my sexuality was really destructive. I became ashamed about being gay, about being sexually attractive and about having sexual desires. It was like going back in the closet.

Money was another big problem. Successive rent periods came where Anthony would spend all of his pay on gambling and alcohol within 48 hours of receiving it, leaving me to pay all the rent and then provide food for us for a fortnight – impossible and it meant instant poverty. As a “solution”, Anthony put me in control of his finances but it was only a licence for him to be as irresponsible as he liked and simply demand more money whenever he wanted it. Of course, refusing because the rent needed to be paid for example, was a dangerous move. On top of all of this, he would also frequently get me to do his work for him. It wasn't uncommon for me to be producing his reports until all hours of the morning while he watched TV. I had given up on my life ever being enjoyable again. My whole sense of individual identity was gone and I felt as though I barely existed.

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A friend from the previous city I lived in sent me a book. There was a checklist of questions to ask yourself to determine whether you were in an abusive relationship and when I found I was answering yes to almost everything, a crack appeared in the brainwashing and manipulation that had filled my head. I suddenly realized that I had to accept that I was in an abusive relationship.

I took the grand leap of confiding in someone I worked with about my situation and one afternoon, after Anthony threatened to “break both my legs” when I

got home that night, this colleague generously lent me his spare room for a week while I “disappeared” from my home.