

Red Nose Day 2011

Story: MAN JAILED AFTER BEATING UP HIS STUDENT BOYFRIEND

Dean, 22, of Berkshire

A year ago Dean, just 21, was left for dead by his ex-partner who had beaten him up for over six hours. After cleaning his own blood off the walls, the browbeaten victim, wrapped himself in a duvet and waited to die. The next day he was found and taken to hospital having suffered fractures to his eye sockets, his skull, his arms and hands. Doctors told him he had lost so much blood he had only hours to live.

Dean could not believe his luck when he met a charismatic and enthralling man at a party. So mesmerised was he by this new man in his life, that Dean lost no time in moving in with his new love. But, Dean now realises, the warning signs were there that this relationship was not going to be normal. "It became clear to me that he was taking cannabis and growing it. Now I'm no angel but his involvement became deeper and deeper, soon we'd moved somewhere which basically became a cannabis factory". Dean's partner also began, after a period of time, taking crystal meth.

The violence started on Christmas Day in 2008 when Dean announced he was going to see his mum. "He hit me once and then tried to make it up to me but that was the start. By March the next year, the abuse was happening every day".

His partner became increasingly paranoid believing all sorts of crazy things were true. He tried to control Dean dictating what clothes he could wear and what food he could eat. He even persuaded Dean to abandon his university course and he wasn't not allowed any money. This was so bad, that Dean even had to steal food from a shop on at least one occasion. The violence came to head one day when the couple had an argument over a DVD. Dean's partner said he was going away and was going to get a taxi. Dean saw him off, but when he got home, his partner was waiting for him and the attack began. Dean didn't fight back. The following week his partner was arrested, while partying with friends.

The project, with workers funded by Comic Relief, helped Dean cope with the trauma of what had happened to him. Workers also supported him through the court case after which his former partner was jailed for five years. He's due to be released next year. Now Dean is hoping to return to university to finish his degree and is working hard to form a new relationship with Michae (not his real name). But it's not easy, Dean has lost his self-confidence, has panic attacks and struggles with his anxiety.

Michael, 33, said: "It just makes my blood boil that someone could hurt someone as small as Dean. There's no excuse for violence. I saw domestic violence during my childhood and I always swore I would never raise my hand to a partner and I never have."

"I just want to be happy," Dean said "and now with Michael, I'm really trying hard to rebuild my life."

Story: TEENAGER REBUILDS HER LIFE AFTER FLEEING VIOLENT DAD

'Rebecca' 13, of Berkshire

Rebecca first became aware that her parents' marriage was unhappy about two years ago. But she did not dream that it would become so bad that she would be forced with her mum and siblings to flee the family home and seek sanctuary in a refuge. Now she is re-building her life and planning a future without the fear of violence. But she still has to cope with the fact that her dad lives in the area and, although he cannot come close to her legally, she will bump into him now and then. Just seeing him terrifies her.

Rebecca was about 11 when she began to accept that her parents' relationship was not normal. She realised that her dad didn't speak nicely to her mum and she became aware that her mum was being hit, often with objects including the tv remote control. Her mum was forced to obey her dad's rules which even included having her hair cut short and dyed red – so no one else would look at her. But the abuse didn't stop there. Rebecca's dad was verbally abusive to her, often calling her fat, saying she was just like her mum and meting out the same treatment to her brother and sisters. If she was naughty, her dad would pick her up and throw her up the stairs. If her brother was naughty he'd be hooked up to the door handle by his top.

She doesn't remember what single incident led to her mum deciding it was time to go. She just remembers packing bags, going to her nan's home and waiting for help. And help did come, from the East Berks & South Bucks Women's Aid project who took the family into one of their refuges where they lived for months while sorting out a future. During that time, this defensive and quiet teenager came out of her shell and began to trust the staff and learn that others had experienced the same violence in their lives and come out of it.

All the time, this was happening her father would try to make contact, including sending abusive birthday cards to her at school and through a social networking site on the internet. Once she was shopping with her sister and saw her dad in town watching her.

"I am scared of my dad. He came close and I just screamed and screamed and screamed." The shop owner sought help and security guards removed her dad from the shopping centre. But this is one of several incidents where she's spotted her father and had to hide or seek help. In spite of this fear, Rebecca is a bubbly down-to-earth teenager who openly talks about her experiences of domestic violence. She is now enjoying thinking about her future career.

“I’m thinking of maybe training to be a social worker or a teacher. Even I’m able to I might even try to be a vet. I love children and animals and I love riding horses. I feel I’ve got something to offer.”

Story: YOUNG MUM BREAKS FREE FROM ABUSIVE BOYFRIEND

'Sarah' 19, from Berkshire

Sarah's inability to leave the abusive partner who pushed her around, called her nasty names, chose what she wore, when she went out and who she saw, has cost her dear. Her need to return to her abuser because she believed she couldn't function without him meant she almost lost custody of her daughter. When social services took her child away, Sarah decided to take charge of her own destiny and she sought refuge from the man who had made her life such a misery.

"I first realised that this man might not be what he first seemed when he started talking to me in a nasty tone, he just stopped speaking time civilly and was routinely calling me a fxxxing bitch or a stupid cow. But as soon as he found out I was pregnant the physical abuse began," Sarah said.

She was told that she had to obey his rules which included allowing him to choose who she saw, when and if she went out, even what she had to eat. Increasingly Sarah was told she couldn't go to work and he would beg her to stay at home. When she refused he'd put his fist through the door, or a wall. Gradually Sarah became increasingly isolated from friends and family – none of whom liked the man in her life. If she disobeyed the rules she was locked in the house, or locked out of the house for hours at a time.

"One incident that sticks in my mind was when I was washing up in the kitchen and he came into the kitchen and I heard him taking a knife from the block. He was angry about something and I thought that knife is for me, He's going to stick it into me and I waited. But he stabbed it into the work surface."

In spite of the fear in her life, Sarah couldn't break away from this man. She reported every incident of violence but always withdrew her statement as the case progressed. It was only when, after having her baby, that she returned to him and her baby was taken from her that she broke free. "I just thought, this is it, I'm gone, I packed my bags and I left".

With the help of the East Berks & South Bucks Women's Aid, Sarah has found sanctuary in a refuge where she has slowly regained her self-confidence. After a few months, she'd made so much progress that her daughter was returned to her. She's now preparing to move into her own home and preparing to return to college.

"Domestic violence gets worse the longer you stay in a relationship. My life is so much better now, I've got my daughter, I'm now supported by my family and I could not wish for anything."