

“Mommy, Daddy says he is going to kill you”

“Mommy, Daddy says you are going to die”

My young daughter continues to say after court ordered parenting time with my abusive ex husband

I have had to live through hell on earth. And the worst part the abuse has been done legally by the VERY SYSTEMS DESIGNED TO PROTECT MY CHILD AND MYSELF.

To this day I still don't comprehend what happened to my life. I had a home, great management job, marriage and baby on the way, my middle-class life was set or I thought. But, just after my daughter was born was when the abuse started. My ex-husband was talking about our child dying when she was 2 weeks old. This was just the start. I no longer existed. The beautiful child we created together he wanted nothing to do with. Or me. Anytime I tried to bring this up I was told I was “selfish”. The abuse only escalated from there to daily verbal, mental, financial abuse and the first time I left she was 4 months, I left for good when our daughter was 6 months after non-stop abuse and constant threats of physical violence, and he told me chillingly our daughter was “going to die in her sleep”.

I thought leaving would mean I could keep our daughter and myself safe. I was wrong. Very very wrong.

The abuse I have endured in the past 3 years since leaving my abusive marriage has been the worst thing that I have ever experienced in my life. Worse than the abuse I endured in my marriage. While I left a very intolerable, scary and abusive situation every single day I wake up like I am in a horror movie or nightmare I can't wake up from. And this has been at the hands of Family Court, lawyers, Police, Children's Aid Society and Halton Women's Shelter.

My basic human rights to live safely and free of abuse are being violated. They say to leave – then what? – the abuse after I left has been a million times worse as my ex-husband has used Family Court to terrorize me and now, despite my very valid safety concerns, I am forced to hand our daughter over unsupervised. I hug and kiss her before passing her to his arms like it is the last time I'm going to see her alive.

I am a very resourceful individual and I have gone to every possible system to help me which none has – or will – or most disgustingly turns it into an opportunity for themselves. I tried repeatedly to go to Halton Women's Shelter when I first left who didn't have space, but what they did do was push me to use the \$600/hour lawyer down the street from them who promised she would help me. I spent \$11,000 with their firm citing my safety concerns only to be told later by her that “well there must have been something you saw in him and its why you married him”. I know I am not alone in experiences like this and *some* shelters use women as a funnel to prospect new clients to local lawyers. This vile profiting of DV victims seems to be the consistent experience with anything that touches Family Courts.

Even my own lawyer who has recently told me I need to learn to “live with him threatening your life” through my child. I fear for my life. I cannot say for sure he will not kill our daughter. It's a definitely a possibility. The warning signs are there. But my lawyer dismisses my concerns because she knows no one will care. And, even though I have many risk factor for filicide, the worst outcome other than my death, is that I would loose custody of our child because I am feeding into his “Parental Alienation Narrative” by trying to keep our daughter safe and reporting that our daughter has been telling me that

“Daddy is going to kill Mommy” and “Mommy, Daddy says you are going to die”. The Parental Alienation strategy has been used over and over by abusive men, it is so effective in Family Courts for mother’s to lose custody of their children all together, especially Milton Family Courts.

I have constantly not understood why the general public cares about the safety of children (and women) but the politicians do nothing to change it. Especially when 1 in 4 women experience abuse in their lifetime. DV abuse is going unchecked and no accountability for their abusive actions. But politicians should care because it means they themselves are funding it. I don’t even want to know what the costs are with my 15+ court appearances in past 2 years have cost tax-payers but I’m sure education about DV would be a lot less than the litigation. And not just legal costs, there are true human costs to this. I am a shell of who I used to be. I am unable to work due to being diagnosed with PTSD due to the “continuous and persistent trauma” that is forced on me many times a week dealing with my abuser (handing off our child, skype calls, his emails to me, etc) and non-stop court appearances. I get panic attacks checking my email as I never know what is lurking in my inbox and could be coming at me next for court.

I used to present to thousands of people in my senior level jobs, now I can’t be around even family and friends. I have been thrust into poverty and without someone stopping my ex-husband or the courts from the frequent and unrelenting abuse, I do not know how I will get out of poverty or how mentally I will get better. If you have seen the show “Maids” on Netflix that is exactly what I have been living. I have had to move 4 times in 3 years due to the housing crisis and landlords selling their homes, which has been like gasoline on my mental health not having stability of a home. And unlike the main character “Maddy” in the show “Maids” I struggle with the fact that I have a university degree, several post graduate degrees, which because of the unrelenting abuse of my ex-husband via family courts and not taking my safety concerns seriously, I have been unable to return to work so the prospects for me to dig out of poverty are grim. There are so many costs the government is now paying indirectly to support HIS abuse of me (eg. increased doctors visits for my daughter and I, subsidies because of my lack of income, just to name a few). If you feared for your life, how would your mental health be?

This is non-stop gaslighting – *this is not a me issue* – it is systemic issues that have caused me to develop and struggle with debilitating PTSD. It is an overwhelming issue that DV survivors are being abused by the very systems supposed to protect them and their children. Stop blaming the individual when it is a larger systemic issue. Start calling it what it is – **government supported abuse of domestic abuse victims.**

I am in the same Milton Family Court that Keira Kagan’s mother was in.

I am in front of the same judges that are saying the same things to me - to trust my abuser, cooperate more, he has power and control issues, he has propensity to lie – and these judges have silenced my valid safety concerns.

The Divorce Act changed in July 2020 to recognize Domestic Abuse, yet the outcomes have not changed and are arguably worse. Milton courts are openly known for having worse outcomes for DV survivors.

I feel like a sitting duck, just waiting for my ex-husband to harm me. Honestly, I fear that any reforms will be too late for me given my ex-husbands risk factors for extreme lethal abuse, his ongoing threats via our child and his access to firearms.

Anyone who understands DV could look at my files and see the red flags. My ex-husband who wanted nothing to do with our child, a year after I left him, then filed for primary custody of our daughter. The playbook of these abusive men ARE ALL THE SAME. This is why education and Bill C-233 is so important. But it goes way beyond education. Bill C233 is just the absolute bare minimum that can be done to help.

These are a DV Victims Perspective on Recommendations:

1. Abusers need to be accountable for their actions. Full Stop. If this isn't addressed, nothing will fix the problem. Ever.
2. Support Bill C233 – for ALL JUDGES. Not just new judges. The cost of training is far, far less than the cost of expensive courts for repeat appearances driven by abusive men and lawyers that support them. And the corrupt, child trafficking AFCC is NOT to do said training, training should be with input from actually DV and Family court survivors.
3. Domestic Abuse training for other systems that are supposed to protect – Children's Aid Society, Office of Children's Lawyer, Lawyers, Police.
4. Funding for legal aid or better yet a different model all together. A DV survivor should NOT have to self represent against her abuser (I speak from experience it is terrifying).
5. Oversight Committee for Lawyers conduct and supporting abusive men.
6. Courts to take a stand against abusive behaviour and impacting parenting time (not just standard 50-50 or alt. weekends – you are abusive than you are deemed not safe to be around your child). Judges have gone on record with abusive men stating that “supervised access is not permanent and is only looked at as a stepping-stone to unsupervised access”. This needs to stop. Children deserve to be safe and not around abuse. Indirect abuse to their mother harms the child.
7. Criminalize Coercive Control
8. Remove Parental Alienation from Family Court all together and tied to this is regulation on who can do parenting assessments. It is currently the wild west and abusers are buying custody.
9. Centres or more support where women can access legal assistance and other supports (housing, therapy etc).
10. Inquiry into Milton Courthouse given how outcomes for DV victims are disproportionately worse than any other courthouse in Canada
11. Consent for medical and therapeutic treatment for children not required by abusive parent.

Something has change. I am living in crisis mode and fear for safety for my child and me. I worry I will only be taken seriously after it is too late, just like Keira Kagan and the other woman and children who have perished as victims of domestic abuse.

Signed,

DV Survivor and Survivor of Abusive Milton Family Courts