

“Mom, Dad said that you’re not as smart like him and he is going to get you.” This is what my three year old said after her first visitation with her father after our separation. A few weeks later, after hearing about the circumstances of the death of Keira Kagan, during one of our exchanges my abuser turned to me and said *“well if the courts gave him access to his daughter [Keira’s father], I will get what I want no problem”*.

During the 6 years that I spent in a committed relation with my ex, AS, I experienced abuse of every form—primarily psychological abuse where gaslighting and coercive control were a way of life: *“Stop calling me abusive, I am not abusing you.”*, *“I did not hit you. Throwing things is not hitting you.”*, *“Calling you something when I am angry is not abusive.”*, *“You are always so dramatic.”*, *“If you can’t stop being emotional, I don’t think this relationship will work.”*, *“Get out of my life. No one could ever love someone like you.”*

The emotional abuse was secondary, where I was made to feel guilt over leaving him alone, being concerned over his behavior of staying out all night and partying, made to feel guilty over how little money I made in comparison to him—yet our contributions to the home remained at 50-50.

The physical abuse came soon after with him choking me against a wall, throwing my things at me, pushing me. There was one day we went out on a date to a baseball game, I have no recollection past the second inning and I woke up the next day at 5am, naked in bed with what I found out later was a severe concussion. The story he told was unusual—that he found me passed out in the bathroom after I left the baseball game by myself—in the hours that I was unconscious, he did not call 9-1-1. Infact, a year after the incident I found naked pictures of myself from that night on his phone—when I asked him about them, he said they were for his “documentation”.

The verbal abuse was constant, denigrating, diminishing me as a person—he couldn’t decide whether I was a “bitch” or a “cunt” or a “fucking slut”. The verbal abuse has continued post-separation, but since we are in court, it is now guised as calling me a “disgrace”, “terrible human”, harassing me at all hours of the night, “liar” “manipulative” etc.

The sexual abuse was not constant, but he would never resist the urge to gratify himself with my body, any time of day/night. Forcing himself on me, mostly when I slept, sometimes when I slept next to my child. I would freeze in terror, I would cry, I would say, “please don’t do this”... NOTHING would make him stop, except occasionally if he has too much to drink his penis would become flaccid. But in those instances, he would be so enraged, he would proceed to leave the room violently, do more drugs and watch a lot of porn and make a lot of noise and mess in our home. If I was lucky, he would leave in the middle of the night, if I wasn’t he would have passed out in the home and I would make myself and my daughter scarce the next day.

So why didn’t I leave? So many reasons! But the abuse was never constant. Periods of abuse were followed by periods of absolute bliss with elaborate acts of love and shows of affection (love-bombing). I was 24 when I met AS and he was definitely the first man I fell in love with. I was raised in a Middle East (Saudi Arabia) where the rights of women came secondary to their husbands and family’s needs—so my desire to keep him happy far outweighed by happiness, even in the worst of times because I truly believed that if I gave of myself completely, he would understand my love and dedication to this relationship.

During my pregnancy, the full light of his drug/substance use issues came to light. He was and had been doing cocaine, for 20 years. I was almost 7 months pregnant, and I walked in on him doing cocaine in our bedroom and pleasuring himself to what looked like child pornography to me. I reached out to his family and found no support there. I begged him to go to therapy.

As my daughter grew in that home, it became more and more clear that not only were there substances in the home that were likely not safe for her, but also that his constant abuse of me was not the “normal” home I wanted to create for my daughter. After my daughter sat in cocaine on our couch the weekend of her third birthday, I made the decision to leave. It was her safety that I valued more than my life, and after 2 years in the Guelph-Wellington Court circuit, the court system has fallen short of protecting my daughter and me from our abuser.

After my separation, the abuse did not stop, it just changed form—financial abuse, legal abuse, stalking, harassment/verbal abuse. A simple task like organizing camps for my daughter has resulted in days of emails between him and myself—with him involving both our lawyers—and being unable to articulate what his concerns are with the suggestions that I have made or make alternate suggestions. Financial abuse in that there have now been 6 months of unpaid child support, which I am sure he will pay right before we go to court in August. Phone calls about the verbal abuse and stalking to the police have resulted mostly in them telling me that they cannot do anything unless he does something violent, giving me the number of a shelter, giving me the number to victim’s services for counselling. I have been diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and anorexia in the last year. But I carry on with the determination to give my daughter the best life that I can—the basic human right of safety.

My daughter, H, is 5 years old. She is the strongest parts of me—vocal, colorful in expression, vibrant in her energy, she throws herself into the things and people she loves, she values memories made and experiences (even the difficult ones), and she is learning to put her welfare first (as I try to lead by example). She is also 5 and feels everything deeply—her sadness, happiness, anger, but most of all, her fear. H is fearful of her father—in his home, she shares that she is fearful: *“Dad tells me as soon as I get into the car, no asking or crying for Mom or I will take away your toys”, “Dad gets mad if I miss you.”, “I am only allowed to cry if I get hurt, Dad will get upset if I cry for you”, “Dad threw my matchy matchy bracelet [we have matching bracelets] down the stairs”, “Dad won’t let me have my necklace [with a picture of Mom]”, “Dad took away the pictures of you and me”, “Dad said you’re a liar”, “Dad hit me because I was crying for you”, “Dad said my skin is white like him, not brown like you” “I don’t want to take another drawing for Dad, he will tear it if I made it at home” etc.*

And in any conversation I try to have conveying how these statements damage our daughter, her identity, her emotional security, her self-esteem etc. his response is to call me “manipulative”, “a liar”, tell me that my daughter “knows the kind of person that I am”, tell me that my daughter “never asks for me”, call me “a disgrace to motherhood and humanity”, threatening to “bury me in court”, threatening me stating he had “unlimited financial resources to financial ruin you [me]”, threatening me stating he would remove my daughter from my care. The verbal abuse continues. He continues to berate me in front of our daughter. Despite affidavits from people who have witnessed the abuse, my abuser admitting to the abuse, police reports, and an OCL investigation stating otherwise, a judge has given my abuser a graduated access schedule over the next year to 50-50 access of our daughter. The judge specifically stated that the “abuse was historical and should not impact parenting access and plans moving forward”. Once this final order was made, the abuse has escalated. I will be in court in August seeking full custody (decision-making) of our daughter.

Our daughter is currently in therapy working on herself—managing her strong feelings through cognitive behavioral therapy and self-regulation. But she continues to be scared during transitions to her Dad’s home—because there is no one to co-regulate with her at his home. More recently, she has made some statements to someone who has anonymously called Children’s Aid. However, this is the fourth time they will be involved—and I am certain it will result in no measurable change.

I am here, BEGGING FOR CHANGE, so that my daughter and I can seek safety from our abuser. HELP US by supporting the bill mandating education for judges on DV and IPV (Keira's Law), consequently by creating legislature mandating education on the same to police officers, first responders, social workers, childcare workers. HELP US by introducing legislation enforcing accountability for lies told by abusers in family court. HELP US by introducing legislation making abusers accountable for all types of abuse, not just physical. HELP give my daughter and children like her the childhood and life she deserves—and giving her and me our basic human right of safety.