

Lynda's Story (2011)

Lynda was a social, confident woman with a job she loved; she had three grown-up daughters and then she met a man she fell in love with. She spent 14 years with him, on and off. Their last period together lasted three years, until finally she realised he really couldn't change. This is her story:

"It was magical when we first got together. He was charming, funny, very loving and kind. The relationship was good in all aspects. But within about four months, signs of his controlling nature started to come through. He was very possessive and jealous and eventually others noticed.

"There was emotional and verbal abuse and head games. He was very controlling. He wanted me with him 24-hours a day, he would start rows late at night so that he would tire me out, he'd want to sit up half the night arguing - he could do that for a whole week.

"Every area of my life was affected – social, work, family. I had had lots of family contact before, but every week now I had to choose. But over the journey I did stand up to him and challenge him. One day he had been violent in broad daylight; I went out with friends that night to a bar. He called 61 times (in just over three hours). In the end I just went home. Then there was three days' interrogation about where I had gone, who I had talked to. It wasn't worth it.

"It gradually became physical. He kicked a hole in the wall for no particular reason. At first he'd push me, or punch the wall right by my head – the message was clear. I withdrew from family and friends. I hid the bruises and I lied to the doctor when he broke my finger - he came into the doctor's office with me, to make sure." (An unprovoked and unexpected attack in bed one night left Lynda with a brain injury which took nine months to heal).

"There is a high cost to this stuff. I couldn't work and I had loved my job. Then he overdosed and he became a full-time job. It affected my children, family, friends – it was very, very frightening for them. I didn't really see the life or death situation that they did. They were very frightened he'd kill me or I'd take my own life.

"Most of my friends disappeared – I didn't want to be isolated but sometimes I didn't want to be around them as I was bruised, and I didn't want to communicate. I was ashamed. I knew I was in this awful situation but I wasn't ready to leave. In the end all I had was him.

"He was a sweet-talker – that's what tied me in for so long. He'd be so sorry, so brutally honest about himself and what he'd done. I did really love him and wanted it to work. It would be good for a while, then bad - but the cycle where it was Ok got smaller and smaller."

"I went to another support agency and also talked to Carol (an Aviva worker) on the phone. It was just enough of a lifeline for me to keep sane and keep me going. Those little bits of contact with Aviva and a friend helped me move to a place where I thought if I leave him, I'll be Ok. I had so much support and that was really lifesaving.

"The pain just became bigger than the love. I didn't enjoy the calm because I knew the storm was coming - there was an impending sense of doom.

"When he was unfaithful for a second time I decided I'd had enough. I got divorce papers and I met him in a park with a friend of mine as support and I told him it was over. He was begging, saying "I love you" but I made him sign the papers, then I dropped off all his stuff. I changed my phone numbers so he couldn't contact me and I went to the police and got them to remind him that I had a Protection Order against him.

“It was a horrendous time, just awful. But I told all my friends and family that this is what I’m going to do. I accessed support programmes and Aviva had a course coming up. It got me to look at my strengths and kept me focussed on the reality of the situation I had been living with. Having the support and focus strengthened me to get through a very difficult period.

“It’s been over a year now. I took my time to heal, to do a day-by-day routine. Now I’m firing ahead I’m doing courses at CPIT, working out what I want to do with the rest of my life.

“The family relationships and relationships with my children – there was lots of damage done, but things are healing. I’m living now and I love it. It’s the simple stuff, like going out with good people and going home to a safe house. Just being happy and being safe. I feel like I’ve got myself back again. Now things are just good.”