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My Journey Through Hell; A Memoir of my First Marriage

AN ABUSER NEVER INTRODUCES THEMSELVES AS SUCH. NO ONE WILLINGLY GOES INTO A RELATIONSHIP KNOWING THEY ARE GOING TO BE BEATEN, RAPED, OR PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGED. WE ALL WANT TO SEE THE BEST IN SOMEONE WE ARE INTERESTED IN EVEN AFTER SEEING THE BEGINNING SIGNS THAT WE LATER RECOGNIZE AS RED FLAGS. GETTING MARRIED AT THE AGE OF NINETEEN TO AN ESSENTIAL STRANGER WAS THE DUMBEST THING I HAVE EVER DONE, BUT IT MOTIVATED ME IN THE LONG RUN TO GO AFTER WHAT I TRULY WANTED IN LIFE.

Flashback: Summer 2010

“You can yell and scream all you want, but no one will hear you. If they do, they’ll ignore it.” I heard my husband Vic say as I ran through the house to get away from him while he chased me and scorched my body with a lighter. It was almost time for bed, and I was only wearing a t-shirt and underwear. It was in the middle of July and we did not have an air conditioner in our tiny oven of a home. I really do not even know what I did that time to set him off. We had a good day, went to Boone lake, and had a blast. I am not sure what happened in the following hours that made him so upset with me.

I had managed to finally beat him to one of the two doors leading out of our house, then I felt his hands on my back. **Riiiiiiip** Shit. He literally tore the shirt right off my back. “There, now try and run to the neighbor’s house fucking naked. I know you won’t because you’re a pussy.” I barely hear Vic’s words through my choked sobs and tears as he shoved me onto the front porch in just my panties. “Now, you can stay out here until you calm the f*** down,” he says, as I crouched in the darkest corner of the porch hoping no cars would drive by and shine their lights on me to reveal my half-naked body.

I had never attempted to run away from him before, and I was regretting it as I sat there trying to cover as much of my exposed self as I possibly could have. It was far from cold in the suburbs of Johnson City, Tennessee in July, but I was visibly shaking. I am not sure how much time had passed, but eventually I watched the porch light come on. I quickly scampered down the steps to the side of the porch, getting myself out of the light. “Where the f*** are you,” he asked, as my continued crying gave away my location. He then stepped down and enclosed his arms around my shivering body and led me back up the steps and into the house. “I knew you wouldn’t go anywhere because you know I love you, but you just piss me off so bad!”

I quietly walked into the bedroom and quickly put another shirt on, careful to not smart off or do anything that would draw his attention to me. “What are you doing? It’s hot, and you know I like when you sleep with nothing on,” Vic said, his words dripping like venom from his tongue. He grabbed my arms and pulled me to the bed where he was sitting and watching me. He began the process I knew all too well, as I stayed silent not daring to protest for fear of even worse things he would do. *How did it get to this point? Please just let this time be quick and easy...* I thought to myself, before getting lost in my own mind.

Flashback: The Beginning [Winter 2009]

I met my future husband, Vic, and his best friend Brian at the local YMCA many years ago around 2003 when I was just 13. I immediately had a crush on him as he was older, funny, and smooth with his words. He had jet black hair, tanned skin, and brown eyes that seemed full of life. His smile was almost blinding as his straight, white teeth were the first thing anyone could notice. We hung out solely on the grounds of the Y and talked on the phone. This was all before the days of heavy texting or sending selfies on Snapchat. Nothing ever came of it other than innocent, young attraction. As with most things at that age, the memory of him quickly faded as I entered high school and began growing into my own person.

In late 2009, just after Thanksgiving, Vic and I began talking after nearly seven years. I had all but forgotten about him until I received a random Facebook friend request that cold November night. My boyfriend and I had just broken up, and hey, I had not talked to Vic in years. I accepted the request and we began talking on Facebook chat that night, and it later evolved into texting. He talked me in to meeting up with him a few days later just for a few minutes to “get a hug” and see each other in person. I remember being extremely nervous and shaking from the cold when I went to see him in the desolate parking lot of Goody’s in the infamous “Commons”. It was only for a few minutes because I was borrowing my mom’s car. Mine was not running right and she needed her car back soon.

When I pulled up alongside his car, he had that notorious smile on his face the whole time and he reminded me of the guy I had met at the Y not many years before. We talked about nothing and everything. Mainly, we discussed his previous marriage and their one-

and-a-half-year-old son as he showed me pictures of him. He was one of the cutest toddlers I had ever seen. I went home shortly after, and from that point on I was hooked. Looking back, I think he knew even then in the absolute beginning, that he already had me. He was a cocky son of a bitch, and he played his part well. Little did I know, I was in for one hell of a ride which turned out to be the worst one of my life. Vic and I decided to get together and hang out not long after that.

I drove my little, beat up, thirteen-year-old car to his friend Brian's garage which happened to be adjacent to the house that Brian's grandparents owned and lived in. Apparently, Vic practically lived there with them as he and Brian were always together. We planned to watch movies, but what happened instead is what began the downward spiral of the worst year I have ever encountered. When I arrived, he came outside and met me with that damn smile. He led the way to the garage, and I noticed it looked like any other 20-something year old boy's room, except a car was also inside. There was a futon bed across from an entertainment system which housed a TV and PlayStation. Close by there sat a refrigerator, portable heater, and various tools spread throughout. I sat down on the edge of the futon, which happened to be folded into a couch at the time. "Wait here, I'll be right back. I have something to show you," Vic told me, again flashing that cocky smile I was beginning to admire. *What in the world is he doing?* I had silently wondered to myself. He came back quickly with something small and shiny in his hand. "Do you know what this is?" He asked as he held up some sort of metal piece of tubing. "Umm... no idea," I said, as I nervously laughed and wondered what the hell he had in his hand. "Well, it's part of a tool... but I use it for this." As Vic explained himself, his other hand opened and I noticed he had a white pill in it.

Still confused, I watched him turn to a nearby table covered in grease and metal shavings and begin mashing up the pill into a fine powder. I cautiously stood and walked over to get a closer look. "Have you ever taken a roxy before?" He asked. For those that do not know, "Roxicodone (known as "Roxys," or "Roxies") is a prescription semi-synthetic opioid analgesic with highly addictive properties. This Schedule II narcotic is prescribed by doctors to immediately relieve moderate-to-severe chronic pain by affecting areas of the central nervous system of the body" (blueridgemountainrecovery.com). I shook my head no and thought to myself how this was going to turn out. He separated the powder into two toothpick sized lines on the table. "Watch me. I'm going to do one, and the other is for you if you want it."

I watched Vic as he plugged one nostril with his thumb and held the metal device in his other fingers of the same hand just inside his opposite nostril. He leaned over and snorted that little white line in what seemed like a millisecond. "Doesn't that burn?" I asked, still reveling in what was happening in front of me. "A little," he answered, "but you get used to it and then it feels good." He finished while explaining what it felt like. As he passed me with the metal tool piece, I grabbed it and looked at it for a second, but it did not take me long to realize what I was going to do. Part of me wanted him to like me, and the other part of me just wanted to fit in.

I had smoked weed a few times in my life, but this was new and exciting. I bent over the table and breathed too hard causing the line to be disturbed. "Hey, be careful!" Vic exclaimed as he laughed and straightened it back up. I copied the same technique he had used as I plugged one side of my nose and held the tube in the other. It took me longer to snort my powder than it took him, but it immediately started burning. I quickly raised up and started to gag, feeling like I had just been swept under a wave at the beach. "Don't

fight it,” he said, “let it drain down the back of your throat. That’s how you know you did it right.” It was the worst taste I had ever had in my mouth. It was a strong, bitter, overwhelming taste. It was like chewing dry sand. Vic wiped the remaining powder from the table and licked it off his hand. He led me back to the futon and we sat down. He turned the TV and PlayStation on, and then everything went black.

I was awakened by Vic straddling and kissing me. I was not fighting it, nor did I want to; my body seemed to enjoy it. My entire body was tingling, and I realized that I was feeling the effects of the pill I had taken. All my inhibitions vanished, and I did what my body wanted me to do. It was like everything in my mind had vanished and I was just listening to my body. We continued kissing but it did not extend beyond that. He and I ended up falling asleep on the futon soon after. I was jolted awake early the next morning by someone beating on the door and yelling. I shook Vic awake, because the noises did not seem to faze him. I stayed put, frozen in fear as he jumped up to answer the door. He came back within a couple of minutes. “It’s my mom. She’s freaking out because I never called last night saying I wasn’t coming home,” he explained. “Oh, well I should probably get going anyway. I never told my mom, either,” I said, as I realized I had just spent the night with this guy and barely remembered any of it except my drug-induced whoreness. “Okay, well I had a lot of fun,” he stated, flashing that smile again. “Yeah, so did I.” I heard myself say, smiling back. I got up and grabbed my Vicet and purse, and slowly walked out the door as he followed behind. “So, do I get to see you again?” he asked while walking closer to me. “I guess we’ll see,” I teasingly said, as I grinned at him and let him lean closer to hug me. “I sure hope that’s a yes. I’ll text you, let me know when you make it home.” He finished hugging me and followed me to my car. “I will, I’ll see you later.” I said to him, climbing into my car and cranking it. Vic walked back into the garage and I backed out of the driveway.

The entire drive back to my mom's house I thought to myself and tried to remember all the details of the night we had. *What the fuck was that? That is NOT me! Why did I do that?! Why can't I remember everything?* I struggled with my own thoughts even as I walked into the house and climbed into my own bed. "Woooooow." I said out loud, as I drifted back off to sleep.

Flashback: The Middle [December 2009 – March 2010]

Everyone says that your past does not define you. In my case, it kind of does. I guess that "define" is not the correct term, but it shaped me into who I am today. After the first experience with prescription pain pills that I had with Vic, it led me into about a three-month downward spiral with experimenting with other drugs. His friend Brian was our supplier and could get his hands on just about anything. It did not take long for Vic's abusive side to come out after we initially got together. After that first night in November 2009, we were pretty much inseparable. We soon moved into a house with Brian, his girlfriend, and two others. I now refer to that place as the "drug house" because it is in a well-known part of town and drugs were constantly being sold out of it. Everyone who lived there was always high or looking for a way to get high. We stayed up into all hours of the night and slept most of the day. None of us had legitimate jobs, but the house was owned by Brian's family so somehow the bills were always paid.

I remember Vic proposing to me while he was high on Roxy's in the parking lot of our neighborhood Applebee's. I was about to get out of the car, so I was sitting in the driver's seat with the door open. He got on his knee so he was eye-to-eye with me as he slurred the words "Will you marry me?" to me. It was Christmas Eve, and it had been less

than a month since we started seeing each other. I was shellshocked and did not want to upset him or cause a scene, so I said “yes”. I had no intention of following through with it.

Slowly, Vic theoretically began squeezing the life out of me. He did drugs more and more often which led to him being high more than he was sober. He was a constant zombie who started off into space while drooling on himself. We had tried just about every prescription pain killer there is, including Xanax, Opana, Morphine, and even meth a few times. I would not say that I became addicted to anything, but I preferred doing some type of drug everyday so that I could escape the reality that was my life. The months ranging from January to March were all a blur and it is hard for me to believe they even happened. All we did was get high, have sex, and sleep. After those three months I decided I did not like feeling like that and stopped taking any type of medication. I was ashamed of myself and what I had allowed myself to become involved in. I looked in the mirror and saw a hollow, ghost version of myself. We decided that we wanted to get clean and get serious about our future together, so we moved in with his mother in a large apartment underneath her beauty salon.

It started with him making me delete all social media. First it was MySpace, then my Facebook, and eventually he broke my phone. I was not allowed to talk to anyone, including my family members. Ultimately when we had moved into our own home months later, I was not even allowed to walk to the mailbox by myself without him watching from a window. We would be riding in his car and he would drop me off in the middle of the night with no houses or civilization in sight. I had no idea where I was, did not have a phone, and was terrified of being attacked by a wild animal or picked up by a crazed serial killer. I cannot count how many times he did this to me. It was in the middle of winter and I did not

even have a coat to wear. Somehow, for some reason, he continued to make me feel as if I needed him... so I stayed.

The Beginning of the End [April 2010 – November 2010]

Although I had stopped taking any medication, Vic continued to do drugs behind my back. I promised him that I would marry him when he got clean. He convinced me that he had. We married in mid-April of 2010 at the county courthouse. I was wearing flip flops and jean shorts. The man who married us was later convicted for illegal sex crimes. Once we were married, we briefly lived in a house owned by Vic's grandfather in Johnson City. Vic had a habit of disappearing for hours at a time throughout our relationship and leaving me alone with his son with no way of contacting anyone. This was a constant cycle of him leaving, me crying, and him showing back up telling me how sorry he was. Most of the time I did not even know where he went. There were some days he told me he was going to work, which I later found out was a lie and that he did not even have a job at the time. Vic would go to bars, hook up with girls at their houses, and come back home to me at night expecting his dinner to be ready and his son to be taken care of. I cared for his son like he was my own, but I desperately wanted out.

During the time we lived in his grandfather's house, the assaults from Vic were constant when he was ever home. If I questioned anything he did, his rage came through. I mentioned something about being unhappy one night. He responded by getting a handgun I didn't know he had and holding it to both of our heads saying, "If you leave, we both leave".

I felt as if I was trapped and had no way out. I had no friends because he had cut them all off. No one knew where we lived other than his family and his son's mother.

After a few months of unpaid bills from living in Johnson City, Vic's mother allowed us to move into her rental house that was closer to home. I tried to run away from there in the middle of the night once. It was a very rural area and the neighbors were all distant except for one. I was careful to wait until he was asleep, and I slowly slipped out of the front door. I was careful to not allow it to creak as it had so many times before. I began walking in the pitch-dark night headed towards the closest neighbor. I remember feeling elated when I got halfway there, thinking *"This is it! I'm almost there and I can finally get away!"* The next thing I heard I can only describe as a sudden change of air which ended up being him running as fast as he could in my direction. He plowed into my body so hard that I flipped heels-over-head and landed on the ground with the air knocked out of me. As I was struggling to regain my breath, Vic threw me over his shoulder and hauled me back into the house. Once we got back inside, he said things like, "You're never leaving me" and "You don't go unless I say you do".

Many other occurrences happened over the course of just a few months, such as the time he punched me in the face in front of his son because I unplugged his Xbox while he was playing it, or the time he told me that he had been sleeping with a girl while I was sleeping in the room beside them at the "drug house". None of these stories come even close to describing the full amount of torture this psychopath put me through.

The End: Thanksgiving 2010

We fought constantly. If I said or did the wrong thing, he would haul off and punch me as hard as he could in the back or the arm. These were places that no one thought twice about if it were bruised. One morning a few days before Thanksgiving of 2009, I woke up and Vic wasn't in the bed. He had decided he was done with me and packed all my clothes into a bag which were waiting in the hallway. He forced me into the car, and we began driving to my mother's house. As we pulled into the driveway about twenty minutes later, I was sobbing uncontrollably because he has made me feel like I am nothing without him. I am blaming myself for all his faults and mistakes, begging him for forgiveness for things I didn't even do. Then, he told me he had been with at least fifteen other women during our short relationship and that one of them was pregnant with his child.

I spent Thanksgiving with my family and a close friend. Many of them were shocked to see me but did not say much about him. My mom had told everyone that we were going through something and it would be best to not talk about it. She knew he was manipulative, but she had not yet learned of all the evil this man had been capable of. After about a month or two, he finally stopped texting, calling, and harassing me. He had been sending me all kinds of messages on Facebook and through text about everything bad he did behind my back. The truth was that no one was pregnant, he just wanted an easy 'out' so that I would feel even worse about everything that he put me through.

Present Day: 2020

Vic told me that I would never amount to anything and that was my motivation for **years** after our split. Within a month of moving back home, I became a CNA and got a job making my own money. I slowly began reaching out to my friends again and had to relearn

who I was. I met a man who showed me how I am supposed to be loved. He is now my husband. I later became a pharmacy technician and have done that job for over 7 years. I had my first child. I enrolled at the local community college and got my associates degree in 2019. I had my second child. I am now in my senior year pursuing my bachelor's degree in English.

My husband has helped me learn to love myself again and has truly shown me what a relationship is supposed to be like. Getting married at the young age of 19 to a practical stranger was the worst thing I have ever done and led to a lot of heartbreak and different levels of pain, but I am not sure if I would change any of it. It made me stronger, and it gave me motivation to go after what I truly wanted in life. It led me to my dream man who gave me the most beautiful children. The last I heard, Vic was still beating every woman he gets with despite my warnings and stories I have told to the people who ask me about it. All I can do now is focus on the future with my little family and chase our dreams.