

Isabella Marrin

Dr. O'Donnell

November 2021

Narrative Essay

**** All names, including that of the author's, has been changed. ****

The Two Years That Changed My Life: A Story of the "Love" and Abuse of a Naïve Girl

Everyone hears stories of abuse and what it means to not only experience it but escape and overcome it. Luckily, however, most people never know the horror, isolation, and difficulty of the process. An abusive relationship can sneak up on a person, and before they truly know what is going on, they will be completely lost in it, and oftentimes, will not see anyway out. For some, leaving becomes the priority, while for others simply surviving becomes their entire goal. This is the story of the hardest time of my life, the story of my relationship to K.

When I was twenty-one years old in 2015, I was at a crossroads in my life. I had just gotten out of my first long relationship since high school and had come back to my hometown, Johnson City, after living in Cookeville, Tennessee for over a year. I was standing on my friend's porch smoking a cigarette, this was before I quit, in an apartment complex in Boones Creek. A car passed by his porch in the parking lot, and I made eye contact with the man driving. I was young and naive, and at the time, I thought he was one of the most attractive men I had ever seen. He had brown hair that curled into ringlets to his shoulders and crystal blue eyes the color of the Caribbean Sea at night. In what seemed like an act of fate, he just so happened to be going into the apartment next to the one that I was visiting. When he exited his vehicle, a black

Mazda, we began talking and it seemed like I had met someone that would impact the rest of my life. K and I exchanged numbers and began talking constantly.

When he finally asked me on a date, I thought that this was the beginning of the best romantic relationship of my life. In this time, during our initial conversations, we had realized that we hung out with the same type of people and our friend groups blended together seamlessly, which, in my mind, seemed like a good sign that our relationship would last. We both seemed to fit the description of new age hippies and were proud of that fact. Everything about him seemed like we would be together forever, like I had found my perfect match. I could never have imagined what was actually to come.

In the initial months of our relationship, everything seemed perfect. We liked the same kind of music, food, and people. We both had old souls, in that, our favorite bands to listen to were the Grateful Dead and the Beatles and we both wished we had been born in 1950 so we could have experienced the hippie movement of the sixties and seventies in person. We also listened to dubstep, a genre of electronic dance music, that was still relatively new at the time. K helped me to experience many things that I had always dreamed of but had never been able to actually experience for myself, such as music festivals like Camp Bisco, Okeechobee, Electric Forest, and Suwanee Music Festival. We would often go up to Asheville and eat at our favorite Cali-Mex restaurant, the Lucky Otter before going and walking along the French Broad River or catching a concert at The Orange Peel.

When he eventually asked me to move in together, I agreed without a hesitation or reservation as I truly thought we would spend the rest of our lives together. At this point, we

had been together for about six months, and we had had a few, what I thought, were big fights and things had never truly escalated. The fights were what I at the time considered to be bad, screaming insults that we did not mean and slamming doors, before apologizing and moving forward. At the time, I thought that these were good signs, that we would be able to navigate the complications of an adult relationship and build a future together. I did not know how wrong I was.

.....

We had been searching for an apartment for about two months before we found one that we both liked and could afford. It was a very small one bedroom right behind ETSU, which was perfect for us as he worked in South Johnson City, and I worked in North Johnson City and it was a five-minute drive to downtown, which we frequented during our free time. We signed the lease agreement and moved our stuff in, and I was beyond excited and happy. One night, about two weeks after we moved in, he asked me if I wanted to go to dinner at The Label in downtown to celebrate our new home. I agreed and began getting ready for our date. I will never forget how excited I was to go out with him that night.

At this point I need to stop and explain a little about the health issues that I have, as they come to play an important role in K and mine's relationship. I have a chronic disease that causes me to become incredibly nauseated, generally for a week at a time and is distinguishable by the severe stomach pain that accompanies the nausea. When I am experiencing one of these episodes, I throw up violently and am unable to keep anything down, even water. It is fairly typical when I go through one of these bouts that I will lose anywhere from seven to fifteen pounds and will typically not recover until I go to the hospital and receive treatment in the

emergency room. I also need to explain, that I no longer have a gall bladder, and as such, I have difficulty eating greasy or fattening food. The combination of no gall bladder and my chronic disease causes me, to this day, many issues and seem to build off of each other. There are times that eating something that my body can not process due to my lack of gall bladder can trigger a sickness episode of my chronic disease.

.....

K always dealt, relatively graciously, with my illness, and never made too big a deal about it. He typically did not complain if I got sick and we had to miss an event that we had been planning, but everything changed the night that we went to The Label. The night started off great. We ordered top-shelf margaritas and I ordered a hamburger for dinner that night. The meal was delicious, but unfortunately, did not agree with me, and before we even had time to finish our meals and leave the restaurant, I had already begun to lose my strength and feel nauseated. I was afraid that I was about to sink into another episode, and the pain I was feeling in my stomach was becoming very intense. I did not want to make a scene at the Label, which is a relatively nice restaurant, and so I asked him if we could get boxes and take the rest of our food home. K agreed, but I could tell that he was very angry.

When we reached the car that night and got inside, he began yelling. He was saying truly awful things. Things that a person should never have to hear from their significant other. I will never forget when he told me for the first time that he was, "tired of being with a sick girl," something he later came to say almost every day. When we got back to our apartment the fighting began in earnest. This was a K I had never seen before. He was being aggressive by getting way too close to me while screaming in my face. He called me everything under the sun,

from stupid to worthless, before finally backhanding me across the face. I will never forget the first few seconds after this happened. The shock that coursed through my body and mind left me feeling numb and disbelieving. I began crying, and he began apologizing, and as I mentioned previously, I was naïve at the time and believed him. I had never experienced anything like that before as I was lucky enough to grow up in a very safe and stable home, where my father would never have laid a finger on my mother.

.....

From that night on the abuse escalated. K was never afraid to leave marks on me, and he hurt me in many ways. Being smacked, kicked, and choked to the point of unconsciousness became regular occurrences for me, and I became very good at covering up the bruises and marks using make up. He even kicked me in the stomach while I was four months pregnant with his child and caused me to miscarry. The worst thing he would regularly do, from my perspective looking back, would be to wrestle me onto the ground until I was laying on my stomach before putting his knees in the center of my back and grabbing my hair and pulling my head back so far that I was unable to take a breath and eventually passed out from lack of oxygen, which he would do so that I could not scream anymore. My health had continued to deteriorate, and my weight dropped down to around eighty pounds. It took a year and a half, and him throwing me around a hotel room in Asheville while I was in the middle of an episode of my chronic illness, for me to realize that I had to get away from him, or I would most likely die.

Leaving K was one of the hardest things that I have ever done in my life, and without the support of my friends and family, I never would have gotten through it. When we got back from

Asheville after that trip, I went straight to my mother's house and finally confessed what had been going on. I had hidden it from everyone in my life since the very first time it happened because I was embarrassed, but I realized I had no reason to feel that way as the abuse was not caused by me or my actions, but by the emotional trauma of an insecure man. After I finally confessed what was going on to my loved ones, I never went back. I didn't even go back to our, "home" for any of my possessions. I changed my number, and because he had controlled my finances for the years that we were together, I had no money to put down on a new apartment, and instead moved in with my father. Looking back, moving in with my dad was the best decision I could have made for myself, even though, at the time, moving back in with my parents was the last thing I wanted to do.

It is strange, because abuse causes the victims to doubt and blame themselves, even though it is never their fault. It took me realizing that it wasn't my fault and that I was the victim of something terrible to find the strength to confess to those close to me what I had been experiencing. The entire relationship was a harrowing, overwhelming experience that truly shaped who I am as a person today, and I truly believe that if I had stayed with him that I would be dead by now.

.....

I am twenty-eight, and a senior at ETSU. If you would like to contact me to ask questions about my experiences, talk about your own, or receive advice/support in leaving a situation you are in, please feel free to contact me at dreamconsciously@gmail.com