

Victoria's Story

Vicky

This is my story...

It all seems like a blur now, a blip on the radar of my life. You never think it could happen to you, and if it did happen you would tell yourself you'd never stay. I remember thinking that before I met Jim. Once when friends told me about their unhealthy relationships, I remember giving them advice: "Just leave! You'll find better, you deserve better." But what did I know? That advice always seemed to fall on deaf ears. Some of those friends did leave their significant others; some months or years later they would come back and apologize for not listening. Never in my life did I think that I would be one of them.

I had started dating him my freshman year of college, and everything was wonderful. I felt like I had found someone who really loved me, regardless of my mother's pleas to not move in with him so soon; because, after all, I felt like I knew better. Of course, my mother had seen warning signs. "He seems a little controlling," she'd say (it echoes in my head now) or "he doesn't seem to like any of your friends." But I had dismissed those worries because I was in love and because I felt like my mother was being over-protective and over-analytical. These would be some of the many excuses that would build up over the next three years.

It had all started with the little things: jealousy over a new friend I had met in school, wanting to keep me in the apartment because we didn't "spend enough time together," etc. I remember the feeling of being trapped, even then, but never seeing a way out. Early on, I came up with every excuse in the book for him; it was my fault he felt jealous because I had a lot of guy friends, or he always says sorry after he yells or throws something, so it's really just an accident; more of an "in the heat of the moment" kind of thing. My friends were skeptical, and I remember hiding things from them just to avoid the "we really think you should leave" confrontation again and again. After all, what did they know? I told them about all the bad things but never the good. They didn't know how much Jim really did care about me. He just got angry sometimes, that's all. Who were they to judge?

Soon, I began feeling like I lived a double life. In order to see any of my best friends, I'd have to lie to Jim about being at school and doing homework, but the backlash that came back from him when he found out I had lied was terrifying, so it didn't happen often. He was in complete control of my life.

One time, I had went to Barnes and Noble with my best friends Gina and Lisa to read magazines. I told Jim I had been at school when I received a call from him saying he saw me walking down the street. I left them abruptly without saying a word and ran back to my apartment. When I arrived he had locked me out of our

apartment and I sat in the hallway for what seemed like an eternity feeling embarrassed and ashamed. When he finally opened the door, he dragged me in by my hair and sat me at the table. I apologized and apologized but he just continued to yell at me. Eventually, he finished his argument by spitting in my face and retreating to another corner of the small studio apartment. I was trapped in with him. A knock on the door came, and he ordered me to the door to answer it. In tears, I opened it and there were my two friends from Barnes and Noble looking frightened. “You didn’t answer any of our calls, we were worried, and we waited outside for 30 minutes for someone to buzz us in to check on you.” Jim stood beside me. “She’s fine,” he said and slammed the door.

There were numerous incidents similar to this: he’d get home first after a fight and lock me out; he wouldn’t let me go home to my family for the holidays because he didn’t like being left alone for more than two days; he wouldn’t let my sister stay when she came to visit; he wouldn’t let me answer my phone; I missed school days because he thought I had lied about my schedule; I lost friends because he wouldn’t let me contact them, etc. I lived in constant fear, my body and mind in constant fight or flight mode, but with no option of flight around.

Then came the night that really broke my mother’s patience. After three years of my covering for him and my living life afraid, he had seen a picture of me smoking a cigarette. He had hacked into one of my

friend's photo account. I was asleep on the couch when he saw the picture; I was woken up by the tugging and pulling of my hair and being thrown onto the floor. While I knew I shouldn't have smoked, (it has been a year and a half since I last smoked, just as an aside) he wanted to make a point of getting his opinion across. He picked up my purse and found a hidden pack of cigarettes he then opened and threw at me while I was on the floor while he screamed at me. While holding the back of my head, he shoved a handful of cigarettes into my mouth making me chew them while holding my mouth shut so I couldn't spit them out or let the vomit out. He then proceeded to put my head through our hallway wall. I was crying hysterically, dizzy and bleeding, when he brought me to the bathroom to flush my head in the toilet until I was unconscious. I woke up to him smacking my face and spitting on me, "CALL YOUR MOTHER AND TELL HER WHAT A TERRIBLE PERSON YOU ARE" he screamed.

"Mom," hysterically crying and barely being able to get any words out, "I started smoking cigarettes and I'm really sorry" My mother in the truest sense of herself "That's okay hunny -- I'm not mad. What's wrong? what is he doing? Are you okay?" "I am, and I love you" and I hung up the phone; he ordered me not pick up her persistent calls. Later, I woke up when he was sleeping and found my phone where he had hidden it, and I secretly texted my mom saying sorry and that I was okay.

I felt like a shadow of a person; I felt I had no identity without Jim. I had built my life around him and while it wasn't anything great it was all I had (so I thought). It was embedded in my brain from him – I couldn't leave; I wouldn't find anyone who loved me the way he did. I was embarrassed by what I thought was weakness, and I was ashamed of what I had become. Years before, my mother had left our father for similar reasons, and I felt I wasn't strong like she. I was depressed and felt trapped. I was lost; what could I do? I had alienated myself from people who loved me. I didn't think I had anywhere to go. I had become complacent with staying because I couldn't imagine leaving. After everything, I still felt like I loved Jim; he was just troubled, and I seemed to be there at all the wrong times.

Then one random day (that would forever change my life) I was getting coffee before going to the studio at school, and I received a call. My mother and aunt had driven all the way from New York to Philadelphia. Jim was at work, and they were there to move me out. I cried, pleading, "he'll find me" and "I love him." My mother and my aunt had enlisted worried friends who came without delay to my aid and moved all of my belongings in two hours into our small car. My mom decided that I was moving to ANYWHERE away so I wouldn't be put through this anymore.

My mother and aunt left later that day, but they made sure to cover all of our bases. We had gotten my phone number changed (which I was unaware of at the

time, but this can be done in cases like by most phone carriers for free) and I was off the lease at the apartment thanks to my mother's ability to persuade. I was free at last and suddenly I was even more distraught. I thought I would've felt better – I was my own person again. But I was so beaten down I wasn't sure how I would go on without him; I was preoccupied, confused, and once again lost. After all mom's hard work, I just wanted to retreat back to him, and a few weeks later I did. I kept this secret from my mother as I spent the next couple weeks with him before he moved away. Without him moving and without my mother's work, I'm almost 100% sure I would still be in an unhealthy relationship.

This is not a story of how I heroically came out of this standing on my own, or how I saw some light at the end of the tunnel and knew I'd make it out of all of this a better person. This is a story of how I defaulted more than once, couldn't believe in myself and needed the help of people who loved me. While some people can help themselves in these situations, a lot of us cannot and you have to know that that is okay and doesn't make you weak. The people who abuse us are manipulative and brainwashing and will make you feel helpless. It's okay to ask for help, and to accept a way out. Without the people who loved me and never gave up on me there was no way out of that jail cell I called an apartment with the horrible man that I continued to love, in spite of myself. Sometimes you have to depend on others to be strong for you, and there is always someone out there who will do

that for you. There is always someone who cares about you. You are never alone even when you feel that you are.

Unfortunately, a few years after I left Jim, my mother unexpectedly passed away. I think about all the time I could've had with her if it wasn't for him, and how I am mad at myself for not asking for help sooner and trusting the opinions of others around me that I would be okay. Time is all you have with the people you love, and it should never be wasted on people like Jim.

I am now in my senior year of nursing at Molloy, with great grades and great friends. I live with the aunt who came to my rescue almost five years ago and saved me with my mother from that life. I have a wonderful boyfriend, who cares more for me than I could have ever imagined and has all the patience in the world for someone who needs to gain more patience for herself. Years ago I never thought I would be where I am today. However, I am -- and it feels amazing.

You can always leave whenever you want, and there are always people who will help you. Don't ever forget that and don't ever feel hopeless.