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Lucy's story



I was treated like an ugly little girl, and I believed I was.

I have a scar across my nose and cheek from when my mother threw me out the door onto the concrete step when I was three years old. She said she did that because of the look I had on my face.

The number of times my mother grabbed me by my hair and banged me up against the wall or hit me with whatever she could find because of the look on my face! My little brother once said, "I used to wonder why you kept putting that look on your face when you knew you were going to get a hiding for it". But I wasn't pulling a face. It was just my face!

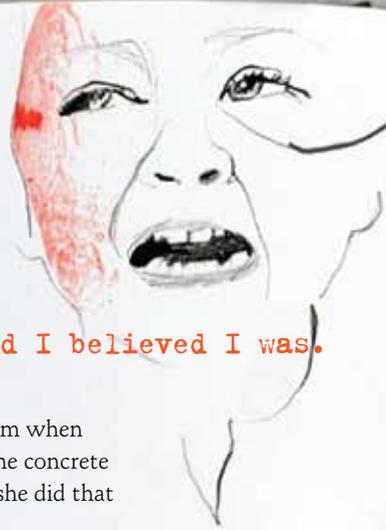
I was treated like an ugly little girl, and I believed I was. My mother used to say there weren't any photos of me because I looked as if I'd been hit on the face with a shovel. But I've seen pictures of me, and I was a dear little girl. It wasn't until I was in my forties that I realised I looked like everybody else.

I'm fifty now, and looking back, I think my mother was a woman who should never have had children. I can only ever remember being afraid of her. I was literally terrified of the woman.

She mainly hit me with the kettle cord or a strap, but she used anything she could lay her hands on.

She once attacked one of my brothers with a fry pan.

There must have been bruises, but nobody said anything. Nearly every kid in our street was abused in some way. Our house would have been one of the worst, but the kid next door used to get a hiding with the dog chain and no one would bat an eyelid. That boy's mother heard Mum beating me so badly and heard me crying so loud, that she did frequently come over and say "hey, leave her alone". It never went anywhere though because she beat her kids too. It only made Mum beat me more.



The neighbour knew I was a good kid – unlike my older brother, who went around lighting fires and robbing people, and ended up in jail. He made my life a living hell. If my mother left the house he'd beat me and kick me, so I'd lock myself in the bathroom. I never told Mum because there was no point.

But he had it rough from Mum too. I had it worst, and our little brother had it pretty good. When he was born, my mother gave him to me as if I was his mother even though I was only four. I always tried to keep him out of trouble. If anything happened, I'd hide him.

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I can track back the abuse in my family to my grandparents. My mother's mother came from quite a wealthy family. She had an illegitimate child who was part Maori. Her mother was quite enlightened, and so she kept her child. But then she married my grandfather. His family were much harder people. His mother used to beat her 12 kids with a stock whip. My grandmother didn't want that to happen to her child, so she adopted her out to a Maori part of the family up north.

Then she had my mother, who seemed to have an enchanted life because she was the eldest grandchild and everyone loved her and treated her like a little princess. But I suspect that my grandmother abused her emotionally, because she was emotionally detached, and in a way neglected her. She was a staunch Catholic and she spent the rest of her life grieving because she had given her first child away. Then she had a boy – and the world revolved round him.

My father came from a very well-to-do family. He never laid a hand on my mother, but he abused her in every other way he could, including financially and emotionally. He was an alcoholic – as was she – and a gambler.

They lost a child after I was born and then my mother became obese. She said it was because of going on the pill, but I think it was partly a way of punishing my father. She was very intelligent and artistic but she didn't do anything. She didn't do any housework, and outside was the male equivalent because my father didn't do anything either.



My Aunt Maureen was my
 saving grace and her house
 was a haven for me.

We didn't do homework at our place. Mum was well educated for a woman then, and I think she worked in accountancy before she got pregnant. She had encyclopaedias and books, and she loved being a know-all, but there was no emphasis on our education. I'm doing my social work diploma now, but I didn't find out I had brains until after I started working at the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project (HAIP).

I never invited anyone home, partly because it was such an embarrassing mess, but also because I never knew if Mum was going to attack me when my friends were there. She could be charming. She had some lifelong friends who had daughters, and she became a sort of guru to some of them. They'd come to her for advice, and after she died they wrote me letters saying how wise and knowledgeable she'd been. But I didn't learn anything from her – nothing about cooking or knitting or the hobbies that she had.

I ran away as soon as I could. I left school at 15 and went to work in a battery factory. By the time I was 17, I was running the winding room. My mother was jealous of the money I earned, and I'd come home and find all my drawers had been tipped out on the floor because she thought my room wasn't tidy enough – even though the house was a pigsty.

Once I left home, I never let my mother get close to me. But I did let her see her grandchildren, and she was a lovely grandmother. It was as if she'd forgotten everything she'd done to me. And she took all the credit for my being a good mother – which I was in the early days.

My whole life has been spent going from one abusive relationship to another. I thought it was normal.

When I was 15, a man of 27, a Vietnam War veteran, took an interest in me. At 16, I ran away and lived with him.

I worked right up to a week before I had my first baby, a week after I turned 18. I had four sons by the time I was 22, and I put my life, my heart and my soul into them. They all learnt to read and write before they went to school, and one got dux of the primary school.

My first husband never hit me, but he abused me financially and emotionally. He had all the money and he was in control of everything. But I thought I was in heaven because he didn't hit me and there were no arguments. He went off and did his things in the weekend, and I had my beautiful babies so I was happy.

When I was pregnant with my fourth son, we shifted because my husband wanted to be a prison officer. Because I had big babies and had taken a fall with the third one, my pelvis broke with the fourth and I had to go into hospital. I arrived home with a big strap round my hips, and I couldn't do anything for three months. Then my husband volunteered to work at a prison out in the country – which was typical. He didn't help with anything at home. From the moment I walked in the front gate, everything was my job and my responsibility.

That included discipline. If my boys did something really naughty and I found out, we'd talk about it and have a family meeting, and then they'd get so many swishes on their bum with the cane in front of everybody.

It was public humiliation and brutality. When I gave them a hiding, I gave them a real hiding.

I didn't hit them in anger, but that doesn't make it right.

Both of my brothers came to live with us at various times. The little one started living with me when he was 11. I've only found out recently that when I went out he'd bash them and get them stoned and teach them bad things. The older one was in and out of jail.

Finally, I learnt that my husband was a homosexual, so we separated. I didn't go on the DPB. I just worked my guts out looking after other people's kids, and I made quite a lot of money at that.

Violence was part and parcel of that life. My husband was like the king and he used to hold court in a pub. One night they had a fight and a guy got stabbed and the blood was just spurting out. I swear I could hear it. They were taking bets on how long it would take him to die. He wasn't one of their gang so he was just a nothing.

My husband had told me he never hit women. But one day in the pub a Maori girl knocked his jug. He told her to replace it, and she said no and swore at him. Everyone sitting round us picked up their glasses and moved their table because they knew what was going to happen. He got up and punched her, decked her, kicked her. They dragged her out by her feet with blood running out of her mouth, and dropped her in the gutter. I rang an ambulance. I said to my husband "you told me you don't hit women", and he said "I hit mutts".

Slowly I became a "mutt" too. At first I didn't answer back. If he said "jump" I'd say "how high?" But I started answering back, and he started beating the shit out of me. I had called myself his servant, but then I became his slave.

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The first time he hit me was when my youngest son, who was about five, had left his gumboots in front of the house. My husband came in and picked him up and kicked him across the room. I went to defend him and said "don't kick my child like that". I just got pummelled to the ground.

He was a giant. He couldn't use one arm as a result of polio, but he could swing it and knock you cold. He knocked me unconscious several times with really hard blows to my head, and he cut my head open a couple of times. Even today my head hurts as a result. At the hairdressers I don't let them massage my head because it's too painful.

Once he started hitting me, I really started answering back. I'd wait till he was sitting or lying down and I'd tell him exactly what I thought. I knew it would take him a while to get up because of his arm, so I'd split quick and go and sleep somewhere else. We lived in a huge place. By the next day he'd be over it, but our relationship had deteriorated so much that he'd just hit me anyway.

I became a house slave and my children became farm slaves. My oldest child had been recognised as a genius, but he was expelled because he'd got bored at school and stopped going. He worked for my husband for a



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couple of years loading drums and doing heavy work. My boys had played sport and two represented New Zealand. But my husband didn't like that. Boys were just for working and he worked the guts out of them and kicked them out of home at 15 or 16.

He systematically broke my family. Once the police phoned in the middle of the night and said "we've got your boy in the cells" – and at that point it could have been any of my boys. Mind you, I was lost in drugs at that time – cannabis mostly, and speed when we partied.

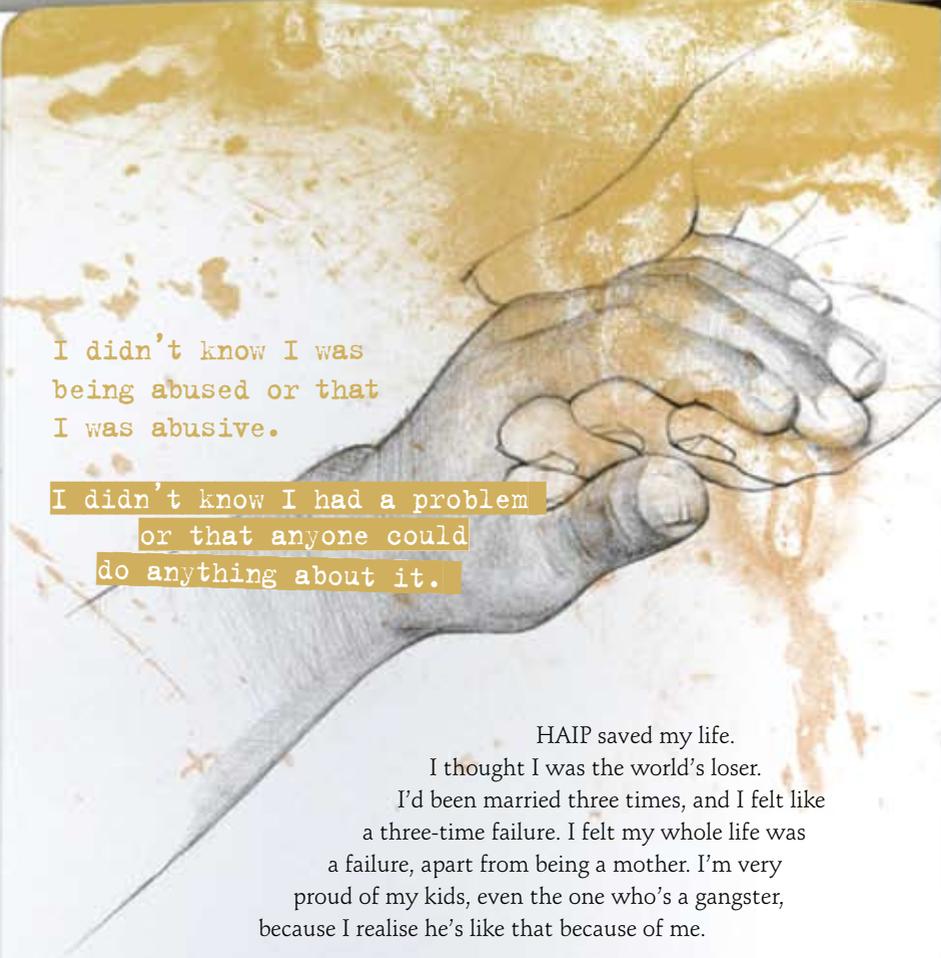
I was always stoned. That was my way of escape.

I've got degenerative arthritis in the bottom of my spine – probably from having too many children too quickly. I went to see specialists and was told I had the back of an 80-year-old woman, that several vertebrae had disintegrated, and that I could have an operation that would stop the pain, but I wouldn't be able to walk. If I didn't have it, I would still probably be in a wheelchair in a couple of years. But my husband still made me load drums three high on to trucks.

He refused to give me any money. Before we got married I had been paid by ACC to be his caregiver, but once I became his wife I didn't get any money and he wouldn't give me any.

He was working me and the children into the ground and then yelling and screaming when there wasn't the food he wanted. But he could spend \$50 on lollies for his friends' kids when they came round in the weekend.

We were the richest people in our group, but of all the women I was the poorest. I was the best treated by the other men, but if they saw my husband giving me a backhander or a punch no one would lift a hand.



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HAIP saved my life.

I thought I was the world's loser.

I'd been married three times, and I felt like a three-time failure. I felt my whole life was a failure, apart from being a mother. I'm very proud of my kids, even the one who's a gangster, because I realise he's like that because of me.

Before I went to HAIP I thought I had the words "come and abuse me" written on my forehead, and that that's how abusive people recognised me and came and got me. But I know now that for people who have been abused, like draws like – you don't know any different and you feel comfortable with what you know. I didn't know I was being abused or that I was abusive. I didn't know I had a problem or that anyone could do anything about it.

I went through HAIP's groups and found out that although I had made so many bad mistakes, so many things were done to me that were wrong. It helped me put the pieces together about why my mother was like she was and why I'm like I am.

I became a facilitator and then the women's coordinator. Then we adapted the women's programmes for teenage girls who were playing up for their mothers because they blamed them for what was going on in the house. The mothers weren't doing the violence but the daughters hated them for letting it happen.

Most kids come to the 10-week youth programme through Child, Youth & Family or the police, but the occasional parent rings in. The boys who attended a pilot school study had been singled out as the naughty boys, but they began to call themselves "the course boys" because they loved coming and learning the stuff that every child should know, and they wanted their girlfriends to learn it too.

We have offenders and perpetrators in the programme, but as far as I can see from my life's experiences we are all victims to start with, so I don't come on heavy with them. The object is to teach them to identify violence and abuse, to let them know it's not their fault, to develop strategies to keep themselves safe and seek support, and to change the pattern in their own lives and break the cycle so it won't go on to the next generation.

It starts off with a one-on-one evaluation in which they talk about themselves. Then we look at history as far as violence goes – that once men were legally allowed to hit their wives and children and now they're not. They often say, "Really? Are they not allowed to hit us?"

They think what happens in their own homes is normal.

Then we look at the different types of abuse – psychological, physical, emotional – and the effect it has on the mother. This is not about blaming fathers, just putting it out there that mothers haven't got any control over the violence that is done to them. You'd be amazed at the number of women who were hit by their mothers or both parents, and the number whose mothers don't believe them when they tell them about sexual abuse.

These kids don't have to put their hands up and own anything. But if I open up, they will too. I tell them the truth about me. I say, "I'm not a teacher or a social worker, but I know a lot about domestic violence and abuse because I've been an abused woman, and I've been an abusive mother. I'd do things differently now, but I didn't know any different then."

We look at guilt and grief. Nowhere are we taught about grief, that you can have this pain and this anger inside you that makes you an angry young man. If you've had things happen to you when you were a little boy, you have grief. You don't wake up and think "I'm so full of grief today", but the feeling and the anger of these emotions stay there and they grow. I ask them, "What do

