



Stephanie's Story

Stephanie's advocate, Anthony, spoke to her about participating in our research, and she wanted to share her story. We spoke to her in her mother's living room, with Anthony there for support, as Stephanie asked. They have been working together for seven years.

Stephanie explained that she got married to Glen, her now ex-husband, when she was 18, after falling pregnant to him at 17. She was pressured by Glen and his father to get an abortion, but Stephanie wanted to keep the baby. During their marriage, Glen was violent and controlling. He prevented her from having any contact with her friends and family, and only allowed her to eat when he ate. On one occasion, before Stephanie knew she was pregnant with their second daughter, Glen pushed her against a wall, kicked her in the stomach and choked her. She almost died.

She had two daughters with Glen, and above all else, wanted to keep them safe.

Child Protection was involved with both of Stephanie's daughters, after they lost weight as babies due to health conditions. Stephanie fought to have her concerns about their health taken seriously, despite having issues with her own health at the time. When Stephanie left Glen, their children were in the care of his parents.

Stephanie has endured a four-year court process with her ex-husband, and his parents, to obtain custody of the children.

Stephanie is now 30, and has a young son with her new partner. Her new partner is supportive and caring, and has a close relationship with her daughters and the rest of her family.

What Stephanie said:

I'm a kind person. I love my kids, they mean the world to me – like anyone hurts them, you're dealing with a mother bear! And that's the way it is with me, my kids always come first, and that's what I always thought. The girls came first before [my son] came in. The girls always came first, so I always put their needs first. And then so – same – you've got to put yourself and I was a little selfish but you've got to put

yourself first too, and I said – really? I've always had that mindset – kids come first. Always. If I didn't get out, I was afraid that I would die... I was afraid that he would kill me. I was afraid that if I didn't get out that the girls wouldn't have their mother, and I couldn't take that chance. And that's why I left when I did.

About the violence Stephanie said:

He threw me out with one of the girls, called the police on me. Called the police on me yeah - and said you come to this house and I would have one of the girls with me and said you come in this house and I'll call the police – and I said oh I need to get something, I can't remember which one it was, Anna or Carly, and I was outside and he would call the police on me. And then they took me to my mum's and he tried to stop them from taking me to my mum's and the police said – no she's coming with us because you're not letting her in. She's got a baby and you're silly – you called us and you're the one that's acting this way. The police were more on my side – than his side. 'Cause they knew that I didn't do anything wrong. They said "What happened?" and I said that he threw me out by my hair.

I had to stay here [at my mum's] 'cause we had a joint bank account and he closed it. And he opened an account but because everything I owned was in that house and he wouldn't let me get it.

I called the police and they said I would have to go through court and that. But he threw all my clothes out ... But I just wanted my clothes. 'Cause I had nothing except for the stuff I was wearing on that... Mum got me some clothes so I could get clothes, so I could go to Centrelink, get a new ID and all that sort of stuff, and open my own account and set up Centrelink so I could get some money and that. So, that I can get my own clothes and things like this, which I did. I had to redo everything 'cause he wouldn't let me get anything.

I had no choice but to leave 'cause I was scared and I knew the girls were safe 'cause they were with his parents. So I knew that they could look after them. But I was more scared 'cause he's hit me so many times that I had no choice but to leave. Or else he would do it again. And then he said that I abandoned the girls. And it's like – no I wasn't abandoning them; it was me making sure that I don't get hit. Protecting myself.

About the perpetrator Stephanie said:

I always stood and talked for myself. And even though I was scared to, but everyone said that I was the one calming him down and controlling him. It's like – NO. And then – it was just – sit here and go on this rollercoaster. And you have a toad with you instead of a Prince. And I kind of felt like – it feels wrong but I kind of felt like I married – how my father was abusive, it's like marrying a similar person to your father.

About Child Protection Stephanie said:

'Cause my stepdad taught me to have a backbone and speak for myself, and that's what I always did was speak for myself. Especially when they tried to take my girls away.

But when I was pregnant with Carly – and then I had Carly – the doctor said we had a meeting and the worse thing of a mother hearing saying – we’ll take Carly away and you just deal with Anna. I was like – no. No – why? And they’re like – ‘cause you can’t handle the two of them. I said how do you know I can’t handle the two of them? I can. Give me a chance to. They were only young – I’m just starting to figure it out!

“I felt restricted on what I could do. Like with a new baby, you’ve gotta [baby]proof everything. And I couldn’t do it because I would get in trouble for it. And it’s just like - whoa. Yeah, I get in trouble for doing it and then I get in trouble if my baby gets sick.”

“Cause we went to court with them and they tried to take the girls off us and then the court said no give them a chance, give them help – parenting courses.

I was agreeing to everything that they put in place and he wasn’t. He wanted to get rid of it. He didn’t like it. And it’s like – work with them. And then they’ll go. They’ll let us be parents. And – no. He kept on arguing and arguing and there was more arguing and that.

About the court process Stephanie said:

I was worried when we first went to court how he said – I abandoned them. And I said – I didn’t abandon them. And the court said I didn’t abandon them. I was leaving them in the hands of their grandparents, pretty much, and even though the court said that – that I left them in the hands of their grandparents. Always I was afraid that he would hurt me. And that’s what I was afraid of. I didn’t want to leave them. I didn’t want to leave them – but it was like – get out now before he hurts you, in front of the girls. That’s one thing I didn’t want them to see.

[After the court process] Finally, I was so happy. And it was over! I said – I can’t do it, I couldn’t do another year of it, like as I said, going in and out, ‘cause I had things to do with the kids. With [my son] being so little. It was taking my time away from him and it’s like – it was bad enough taking my time away from the girls as well. This was the main thing – to spend time with the girls.

It’s just lasted so long and I was just happy that the girls live with me and you know, they spend, they’re going to school which they love going.

About how people should respond Stephanie said:

Some people are shocked when I tell them what happened, like with the choking and the kicking and the pulling hair, it’s like... Just listen and be supporting and just take it on board yourself. Think – this could happen to me. I didn’t think in a million years that it could happen to me but – look – it happened. As Anthony said before I wasn’t even 20! And I went through so much. And so it’s like – you just got to think to yourself, will it happen, will it not happen? And that’s what I think people should feel. Take it on board, what I say. Or if not, at least I’ve said my piece. And what I went through. People can’t believe what I’ve gone through. And they say – did it really happen? And I say – trust me! It happened!

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