

Suzy

I met my girlfriend through a mutual friend just a few months after I came out. Things moved quickly between us even although she had recently just split with her ex. It was all very messy actually as they were still cutting ties when I entered the scene.

Her ex had told me that I should be careful because she had a bit of a temper but at the time I ignored this warning, I just thought she was jealous (this thought was enthusiastically supported by my girlfriend).

From the beginning of our relationship it was extreme; we were either completely in love or we were at each other's throats and fighting. Fights could be around anything - family, money, work, ex partners, the weather...

At one point in our relationship my girlfriend lost her job and she became quite reliant on me. This caused her great issues and although I was the one earning money she wanted to be in control of the finances. I allowed this as I recognised it was a big deal for her and she was feeling insecure.

There were lots of "incidents" over the course of our relationship. I had attended minor injuries a couple of times with broken bones and black eyes. I was losing confidence from her criticism and I was exhausted from her jealousy and my constant efforts to reassure her.

When I realised I might need help it occurred to me that we didn't have many friends - we were really quite isolated. My family were still struggling with my sexuality, specifically they thought I'd let my child down even although I was successfully co-parenting my son despite a difficult split from his dad. It occurred to me that if I asked them for help this would just fuel their opinion that my sexuality was wrong or a phase.

On the very few occasions that I had confided in people about what was going on I wasn't taken seriously. I had told one of my friends about the abuse but he laughed it off "were you fighting over shoes?" The abuse was just downplayed as a "girlie" disagreement that couldn't possibly result in any harm or would somehow be some sort of sexualised entertainment for others to watch. This left me silenced but also I felt so alone and confused. I was genuinely starting to think it was acceptable for a woman to behave in this way or that I had gotten it all wrong and it was just me!

It was after a particularly difficult and long evening of arguing that I decided to look for help. I was nervous when I first approached WAEML through fear of rejection and lack of acceptance about my sexuality however right at the outset there was no assumption my partner was a man. The worker I met with initially didn't refer to the sex of my partner until I did and this didn't seem to make any difference so I was very quickly put at ease.

My worker helped me create a safety plan so I could escape from the relationship, it wasn't easy. I tried to access help in a refuge, however, my income meant I just couldn't afford it. So initially I didn't have anywhere to go and with a lack of peer support I found myself in bouts of depression and anxiety.

I accessed the Freedom Programme. This was great and really helpful although I did find I ended up hiding my sexuality. The facilitators always made a point of explaining the tactics could be used in same sex relationships and they knew my situation so always checked on me, but the majority of the women on the programme spoke of how men had treated them and so they assumed it was the same for everyone. I just didn't have it in me to explain so I let everyone assume I was straight, this is my only regret as it meant I didn't take the opportunity to extend my friendships with others beyond the group and was more about my own fear of being judged than by anything any of the women said or did.

The support I've had from WAEML has been incredible. I have now escaped the abusive relationship and living on my own. My family are more accepting of my situation and co-parenting whilst it is still difficult it is starting to get easier and less bitter. I've recently met a new partner and she is helping to restore my faith in relationships but we are taking it slowly. I see a positive future and I agreed to share my story because I want to encourage any woman living with abuse to reach out - help is available and it can make a difference.