

## My Story

I met my ex-girlfriend roughly 4 years ago in my last year of school. Even before she showed violent or abusive tendencies, she was very forceful, making all the decisions in the relationship and leaving me little room to think, act, and be by myself. I first began to notice that something wasn't right when, not being religious, I said that I did not want to go with her to church, so she decided to lock herself in her room and smash up all her furniture. To end the argument, I attended church with her, which was a glimpse at what was to come. As the school year was coming to an end, she managed to push me into alienating myself from all my friends. She bullied me into spending all my time with her, even though her constant presence and neediness was beginning to suffocate me. All these things came to a head after I left home for my first year of university on the other side of the country.

I'd never really been away from home properly before like this and was apprehensive about meeting new people and making new friends. I got put into student halls on a floor with postgraduates which made life very difficult, I also struggled to get the courses I wanted, which made university life undesirable to say the least. At first my ex coerced me into staying in my flat, saying that certain groups of people weren't right for me and that I shouldn't talk to other girls. Eventually, if I wanted to go out, she would threaten to hurt herself if I wasn't phoning her 24/7 and smashed up her room again when I said that I didn't want this anymore.

This made my position at the university untenable, so I decided to defer a year after the worst 3 months of my life. My ex constantly harassed me to leave, and hoping that this was help matters, I returned. I wasn't allowed to see my family, and she would make me wait at her house alone all day until she returned from school. Eventually I put my foot down and went home for a few days. At this, she threatened to kill herself and told everybody I know that she was pregnant with my baby (which wasn't true). I already had few friends, and this made me feel shameful to go outside. I went to see her the following day, hoping that she had calmed down. The next morning she became physically violent. I told her that I wanted to see my family, and she grabbed me by the arms furiously shaking me. As I tried to leave she threw a plate and a mug at me, avoiding me by inches. At this point I declared the end of the relationship.

However, this wasn't to be the end. She rung me and texted me constantly after we had broken up, not allowing me any breathing space. She even turned up at New Year's uninvited and wouldn't leave until I allowed her to stay the night. At this point, I cut all contact, blocking her on my social media and calls. She rung me around 200 times every week and hacked into my social media accounts to check where I was meeting my friends and would turn up unannounced and cause a scene. She did this at my new place of work, and I was scared I would get fired, but luckily my workplace were very understanding.

Eventually, I called the police, and they went and cautioned her. The calls and texts stopped, and I did not see her again for months until I bumped into her at the gym, and she chased me out of the building wanting to talk to me. She even got another girl I was talking to send photographs of them

together at a bar, and tried to grab me when I bumped into her in a club. I am lucky that I went back to university after this, and that I have only seen her once since then.

To this day, I still get nervous if people talk about her, and if I see her, my heart is in my mouth. For a long time, I was terrified to go outside, and wouldn't enjoy simple comforts of going to a café or a shop because of her. I had some short-term therapy before I went back to the university, and it helped a bit. But I did not realise how much it would affect my confidence in everyday life, causing huge feelings of shame, guilt, self-disgust, and powerlessness, which I still struggle with now. At the time I didn't properly deal with or give those feelings the respect they deserve so they spiralled into huge episodes of anxiety. Thankfully, I am now working in long-term therapy to absolve these issues, feeling much better, and moving forward with my life.