



A story of survival

Brain damaged, strangled and nearly dead is how Shay describes herself, the night of the assault when she almost lost her life.

“The blood vessels in my eyes popped so literally the whole whites of my eyes were red, I looked like a devil and that was from the strangulation. That is how they (medical professionals) knew how close I was to being gone, because of the state of my eyes.”

This was after more than an hour of concentrated assault from her former partner, a man Shay says started showing manipulative and controlling behaviour three months after they started seeing each other.

“Within a month of us seeing each other he was like “oh come and live with me”. Reflecting on his behaviour, it was obsessive very early on, and he got me into his environment very quickly.

“He increasingly isolated me from my family and friends. He always emphasised that I wasn’t to talk about our relationship with anyone, that it was “just between us” and he started tracking my phone. He would control me, through isolation and intimidation.”

After a year living with her partner, Shay insisted on moving out to her own place. She didn’t want to continue the relationship and told him so. “There was no telling him. I was in a situation where I had to just basically do as I was told, and he moved in whether I wanted him to or not. And from then it got increasingly worse.”

Three weeks after moving into the new house, Shay was ready to cut him out of her life for good. “I told him that I really didn’t want us to be together anymore.” This made the situation worse, because as Shay says, “he started to feel like he was losing control.”

Losing control of the relationship coincided with Shay’s partner’s developing interest in guns and security cameras, which he’d installed at their house. Shay was told the cameras were to keep an eye on the property, “but now that I think about it, it was probably to keep an eye on me as well.”

The night Shay told him the relationship was over, “He lost the plot. He choked me and pushed me around, then got into his car to go out, and rammed my car that was parked in front.” Shay didn’t sleep a wink that night. The next morning at the house he said, “I think something really bad is going to happen.” Five days later came the attack that nearly killed her.

After visiting neighbours one night, the situation became extremely violent when they got home. He prevented Shay from getting her phone from the bedroom, repeatedly pushing her to the floor, strangling her, and holding his gun against her throat. Shay slipped in and out of consciousness, barely able to stand. “It was fight or flight. I fought with every bit of strength I had.” Shay escaped to a nearby neighbour’s place, and collapsed on the floor.

Shay had two brain bleeds, a concussion that lasted months, burst blood vessels in her eyes, torn ligaments in her elbow, lacerations and bruises all over her body. The medical recovery took months, and she is still healing from the psychological impacts. “Shine contacted me when I left hospital. My Shine advocate became a massive support system for me for more than six months, and one of the biggest things she helped me with was setting a safety plan up and organising the protection order. I



didn't realise how bad the concussion was, I thought I was permanently brain damaged as I couldn't write down what she was telling me, and my memory and eyesight were both severely affected."

Shine helped Shay navigate the legal complexities of filing a protection order while suffering from her injuries and made the process as easy as possible. "Shine made it straight forward and easy. I sat with my amazing advocate and she helped me fill it out. They put me in a taxi to court to file the protection order and to bring me back again. I didn't have to worry about applying for legal aid, it was all taken care of."

Together with the practical legal assistance and emotional support, Shine offered Shay food parcels and clothing. "I was fortunate in the sense I didn't need those things, but they offer amazing layers of support for people who do have that need."

Shay will never be free of what happened, but she has a message for other women. "Don't ever believe you can help them. The sad reality is, they don't have any regard for you, and it will only get worse."

"I know what it's like to be under an extreme level of control, but the truth is, no matter how afraid you are, reach out to someone and get the support and assistance you need to get out."

About Shine

Founded in 1990, Shine is New Zealand's leading specialist family violence service provider.

Shine is an acronym that stands for Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday. This name – and our aims in addressing domestic violence – are hopeful, positive and optimistic. We want people to feel that there is a light shining on this terrible problem in New Zealand and that there is some brightness ahead.

Shine provides a range of effective, practical and innovative services to achieve our mission to stop family violence in New Zealand. We directly help more than 1000 adults and children every year to become safer through our frontline services, and we indirectly help thousands more through our professional training programmes; Shine RESPOND in communities, the DVFREE programme in workplaces, and our health sector partnerships.

Shine works closely with a number of Government agencies, community organisations and businesses to achieve our goals more effectively, from the NZ Police and Oranga Tamariki to Auckland District Health Board and other DHBs, Community Probation, Whakarongorau, and many more.