

My name is Lizette



I was on the floor curled up, the first time he lifted his hand to me. Thinking back now I can't remember what I thought. Did I have any thoughts?

I would like to share my experiences at the hands of my ex-boyfriend with the readers of *Sister Namibia*.

Five years ago, I was trapped in a painful black hole. I felt my life was over. I had nothing to live for. Yet every day for six years, I seemed to get up, go on auto-pilot and live with the hurt. I was on lock-down, despite a few prison breaks.

It started in autumn, just before Christmas. It began as a perfect story from the movies. Our eyes met and it was over. He pursued me without even having met me. He asked a friend for my number. William* phoned me. Oh and there was an instant spark when I heard his voice, having only had a glimpse of him before. We talked for hours.

The first time we met we felt like old friends. There was a lot of laughter. We both seemed high on champagne..

I was a twenty-one-year-old Baster girl; confident, outgoing, and independent. I postponed my studies for financial independence, having spent a year studying in Cape Town I returned home to Swakopmund. Life was rosy. I enjoyed life, but something was missing. A friend of mine moved to London. I decided to follow suit. I needed a change. Enter William. He was a hunk and totally sweet; the kind who made effort; chocolates, flowers and lots of calls and messages. I thought this

was exactly why I had to come to England; to meet William.

I will never forget the night he asked me to move in. We were talking about the crescent moon. He had become the centre of my world since that chance meeting. I didn't hesitate. I hated the pub/ bar where I worked and lived. I was a rookie and got all the crappy jobs, my handbag was stolen and I despised the carpet reeking of spilled alcohol. I moved within two days.

They say that married couples should enjoy the first three months of the honeymoon phase, cause soon after things go downhill. I tend to believe this.

William spoilt me rotten; treated me like his queen. He was a kind, caring and sweet young man with a rough bad boy past.

But that was in the past he assured me. We often spoke about his life and he would tell me how if he didn't get out of South Africa he would probably have been dead. When I first told my mom that I'm dating a South African, she replied; "Why go all the way to London, there are lots of them close to Namibia." We laughed about that.

The blow came as a total surprise. We were arguing about something I didn't do and it just got out of proportion. He was yelling at me and then bam! Down to the floor. I always loved his big hands, which touched me so tenderly. I covered my face and broke down. What do I do now? I cried for hours. I stayed in bed the next day. He was apologising profusely. I kept crying. He treated me like a patient, bringing me trays of food with flowers and all. Promising it won't happen again. I was numb. I loved this man. He can change. I convinced myself and forgave him. For months we were happy.

I had started work as a filing clerk at a local hospital. I was looking and feeling good. William would wait for me at the gate after work, with peach roses. We would stroll home, my hand in his. These were the moments I treasured.

He lost his job. Things changed. He changed again. All of a sudden I couldn't do anything right anymore. He grew angrier. His fuse would blow for any little thing. He would yell profanities at me. Accusing me of sleeping



around. He kept repeating it over and over again. It made me work twice as hard to please him, to prove my love to him.

One day, with the roses in his hands, he informed me he was to go away for the weekend for a job interview. I didn't believe him. That night I stole his phone and looked at his text messages. There it was. A girl called Daphne. I called her from his phone and told her that he has a live-in girlfriend. She would only be his dish on the side. And he will dump her cause he loves me. I surprised myself. What happened to that independent girl? I lost myself in this process. He went that weekend and I moved out. I cleaned his room and wrote him an emotional letter about how much I loved him and could not accept his cheating. I was distraught. He came back the Sunday. He immediately called. I ignored his calls for a few days. The first of my prison breaks. During the time we dated I managed to push away the friends I had to hide my secret. I loved this man beyond a doubt. They wouldn't understand. I wanted to help him. He needed me. Leaving him I went to live in a house where I felt foreign. Goodness it was England, I was foreign. I answered his call. Within weeks we were trying again. I moved back.

I remember one night particularly well. We argued about something silly and he locked me out of our bedroom. I had to sleep on a bed without any linen in the heart of the English winter. I had become tired of his abuse. Earlier he had given me a sweetie-pie, (round chocolate with cream in the centre). I took that sweetie-pie and threw it in the eye with it and ran. The door was locked. He caught up with me, broke a bottle of Red Heart Rum and pushed the broken bottle against my neck, threatening to kill me if I ever dare fight back or leave him. Trapped in my black hole.

I got a new job, on a boat on River

Thames. Hiding my pain and putting on a mask. It was easy to pretend everything was okay, until I got home at night. He would become this other person I didn't know, where no amount of reasoning could get him to see my point. He would accuse me of the most horrible things. Things I later realised, I believed of myself. I loved him. I kept convincing myself that if I tried this, and didn't do that he wouldn't get so angry.

He was abandoned and then emotionally and physically abused as a boy. His dad was absent. His mom took several boyfriends. I felt extremely sad for William and almost felt that I should make up for some of his hurt. I felt responsible for him and his life.

I found him a job where I worked. It was summer. London was beautiful. We celebrated my twenty-fourth birthday; sailing down the river having dinner. We were smiling at each other. Forgetting the bruise he gave me the night before. He promised to work on his anger.

William despised me wearing make-up. He said I'm marketing and selling myself to other men. I stopped wearing make-up. At our company's year-end function, on the HMS Belfast Warship, used in World War II, William came from nowhere and punched my male colleague Lee. I was paralysed with fear. When my brain started up again, I walked out. On my way out I heard him behind me. When we got to the end of the pier, he took off his belt. I kept walking. Three guys were waiting for him at the end of that pier. He had the keys to our room, so I had to sleep on the couch. The next morning I got a call from the police. William came home the next day, all



beaten up. I felt so sorry for him. He looked like a little boy and I could only open my arms to welcome him home. Another colleague of mine, Jodie advised me to leave William. Said he would only drag me down; that I should walk away. I looked for another job and within a month I left that job and its people.

I was working at a four-star hotel, and felt proud of myself. William was sweet again. It felt like it was us against the world. We moved into a cozy little flat opposite a park. He prepared us a romantic, candle light dinner. I said something. The next moment he threw his wine into my face and smacked a split second later. Numbed by shock and fear, I sat there. Dazed. Why did it still surprise me? Because I truly believed he would change. I blocked out



the hurt and pain when I pretended everything was well and when he hurt me again, it felt unreal. I cleaned myself up and went to bed. He followed me and another battering ensued. William was always cautious of where he hit me and mostly avoided my face. The words. The blows. The tears. The apologies. An all too familiar sequence of events.

I finally kicked him out just before Christmas. A friend of mine, running away from an abusive relationship too came to live with me. With her there, I had the courage to take that step. I moved into a house with other girls. I was moving on. I even came home to Namibia for the first time in four years. I went back to London and had to move again, this time alone. No friends. I worked two jobs, kept myself busy. Saved money and sent it to my mom. I got very lonely. I bumped into William again. He pleaded for me to come back, that he was lost. And he promised to go see someone about his anger problem. I moved back. He saw a counsellor for anger management for a few months. I only lived to please William. We accepted this as our lives. I started studying again. And found out I was sixteen weeks pregnant.

We went to the first scan together, it was a girl. I named her Lily there and then I decided that I will move back to Namibia to have Lily. I didn't want William to be a part of her life. One night I was studying and five months pregnant. I had gotten used to ignoring him by now. Sitting at my work desk, he came up and smacked me. I didn't even know why I was being hit. I passed my professional diploma course with excellent results. I packed up all my belongings, shipped it home and flew home, heavily pregnant. I saw doctors often and all was well with mom and baby.

After a painful three days of labour and extremely bad treatment from the staff at the state hospital I gave birth to Lily-May on 27 October. She was still-born. I was absolutely

broken, blaming myself for her death. Two weeks or so after her burial, I immediately started working in Swakopmund again. I hated being in Namibia.

I moved back to London and back to William three months later. The pain I felt increased. By this time I weighed a 100 kilograms and was a size twenty. I found employment and thought I could do what I did before, throw myself into my work to forget the pain. I couldn't. I found myself slipping into a deeper black hole. And I was scared. I went to see a counsellor. I told her about Lily and the traumatic delivery experience I had in Namibia. I was diagnosed with severe depression and was received Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. CBT focuses on the way people think ("cognitive") and act ("behavioural"). The concept behind CBT is that our thoughts about a situation affect how we feel (emotionally and physically) and how we behave in that situation. As human beings, we give meaning to events that are happening around us.

My therapy only focused on losing my baby. I didn't tell the therapist about the abuse. This was nothing compared to the pain I felt for losing Lily. I had to start thinking differently about things, especially about losing my daughter. It was horribly painful. However, as I progressed in my therapy, I started making small changes in my life. I started walking wherever I could. I felt ugly, fat and hated myself, but I wanted to change that.

A friend gave me a book, *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. It's based on the law of attraction and claims that positive thinking can create life-changing results such as increased wealth, health and happiness. When I had a negative thought, I would change it to a positive one. For example, I was a size twenty, but imagined what I would feel like if I was a size twelve. I started feeling better about a lot of things. I wanted to get better and I found ways that helped me.

In 2009 I moved out for the last time. I left while William was at work. I moved in with some single girls, also Namibian. They were confident, outgoing, happy! Feelings I felt a long time ago. It was good to remember how that feels. I found a job at Yoga Magazine. I started doing yoga, I meditated daily. I was healing. I could smile again, genuinely. And I moved home.

I've not thought about what happened to me in London. I've kept it a secret. Until now. I cannot tell women not to love their abusive partners. But I'd like to encourage you to also love yourself and remember what it was like to be happy.

As the Vice-President of an informal welfare organisation called Victims to Survivors, I felt I needed to share my story with my fellow Namibian women. I'm involved in the fight against gender-based violence in Namibia. With a friend in London, I've started up Precious Children Foundation and spend time with children at a kindergarden in Okahandja Park. I campaign for children's rights. Soon I will also be starting a whole new chapter in my professional life.

I've not been in a relationship since. I simply do not trust myself enough to commit to another relationship. But I'm happy. I'm discovering myself daily and even though I used to get sad at times, I don't anymore. I have healed. I have moved on. I have moved up. And so can you. I'm not proud of some of the choices I've made in life, but even the worst ones made me a better person. And I'm thankful for that.

Lizette Feris