

Beyond My Ken

FEAR
HORROR
EMBARRASMENT
SUBSERVIENCE
SURPRISE
SHOCK

Torture in
marriage

Beyond My Ken

'This is going to be very hard to do. I knew I wasn't ready to do it before, but having committed myself and got it out into the open, I know I have to finish the process. It is the time.' Sounds all very dramatic, doesn't it? You would think that the intervening thirty years would have wiped away some of the pain, but even I have been astonished at its tenacity.

I will do my best to explain. A few years ago I lived in a caravan in the middle of a muddy field with no access or mains services. The objective was to save a four hundred year old cob and thatched farmhouse and we eventually won the battle. A dire and difficult episode but rich in many ways because I found strengths I never thought I had. I also disciplined myself to write every day and for the first time in my life I was able to wallow self-indulgently and allow my thoughts the right to roam in every part of my head.

I subsequently turned those ramblings into a book, *Shoestring Warrior*, hoping that it would, at the very least, inspire others who found themselves in a similar position. I wanted people to think, 'well, if she can do it, so can I'.

During that time I was to plummet the very depths that it was possible to go, places in my head I hadn't visited before and it was getting mighty uncomfortable. Little by little I began to get snatched remembrances of my earlier life, and I didn't like it one little bit. How on earth had I managed to keep all those memories locked up inside me without conveying their stark horror to another living soul? I used to think it was because I was strong, someone who had, in my time, listened to, helped and empowered a few thousand clients to achieve self-realisation. What a joke! All those happily-empowered people running about and me, one of the key factors in their success, still regularly paralysed by severe migraines.

Looking back on that time I believe that the potent mix of those fermenting headaches and the two and a half years of heaven-and-hell during our Rural Idyll kick-started the process of tearing down the last vestiges of the fire-wall I had carefully built around seven years of my first marriage to Ken all those years before.

There, I've said his name. It was like our ancestors' historic reluctance to mention the Devil as they might invoke his presence. His very name made my stomach flutter and summoned up a nagging pain in my groin and it gave me vivid recollections of the newsreel footage of the Berlin Wall being torn down by willing hands. I don't know whether my hands are particularly willing, but I would be a foolish person indeed to stand in the way of such constructive demolition.

I remember exactly when the process started, and it was such a trivial incident. About eight months after we began living in the caravan, we finally got connected up to the national grid.

As we still had no running water I was finding it a bit hard at times boiling up my washing in a big pan on the Rayburn, so bought a second hand twin tub washing machine. Dim recollections started to take shape in that foggy part of my mind about my life with Ken. It was exactly the same model that he and I used to have; it must have been state of the art back then. I remembered the washday ritual of having to soak his snotty handkerchiefs in boiling water to loosen things before washing in the machine. Yuk, yet I did it without a murmur. Same with having to cook regular supplies of fruit cake, apple pies, etc and do all the housework even though I had a full-time and rather demanding job. We had a well-established, orderly life, and I was being moulded into a carbon copy of his mother, the eternal housewife. But I was only nineteen when we got married, and in those days, quite something to have your own detached house with ¼ acre garden.

Ken was seven years older than me. He had thick black hair, kept reasonably short and I think he had a beard. That last sentence shows that he had been consigned so far into the inner reaches of my mind that I couldn't even remember whether he had a beard! He was powerfully built, wore thick black-framed glasses and to my eternal embarrassment, sandals with socks as soon as it was officially summer, no matter what the weather. I wasn't much of a fashion follower, he even less. He wore loose, baggy black jeans, or very ill-fitting casual trousers, with a propensity for off-white 'slacks'. He wore Marks & Spencer countryman flannelette type cotton shirts and had a range of unexciting and very dated baggy cardigans – all he needed was a pipe to complete the old git ensemble.

Before he met me he had broken both arms and legs in a motorcycle accident (he was even given a stitch on the end of his willy!). He wasn't expected to make it through, but somehow he did. The crushed arms had metal plates in them, and I remember him banging his arm on something hard and hearing a reverberation type of pinging coming from the plate! The legs both had steel pins in them that were never removed because the bones had been so badly shattered. He then bought a 1934 vintage car and in the cold winter of 1962 began its complete rebuilding. It was because my father had the same make and model car that I first met Ken.

Ken was a design engineer who had been responsible for a number of ground equipment features for the Concorde. He was interested in so many things in life and our early days were spent visiting pre-Roman sites the length and breadth of the country, about which I became quite knowledgeable. We also got quite involved with motor rallies and hill climbs so I must have been quite hardy in those days. I used to love speed and the open air but now shudder at the thought of driving in, or buying an open top car. The third abiding interest was sailing, but as he was only really happy going out in a force 6, 7 or 8, my enthusiasm was faked. In fact, I was terrified as we sailed in the Bristol Channel. It apparently had the fourth fastest-flowing current in the world, so you could be up on one hull (we had a catamaran) on a broad reach yet still going backwards.

There were years of being soaked to the skin, cutting through huge waves that shifted me bodily down the boat, but I never dared to complain. I have often wondered since if the arthritis I am beginning to suffer from now in my hands, shoulders, neck and back is in any way linked to that time?

All that aside, I am hoping that by writing this I will rid myself of all these memories-by-association and wipe my slate clean.

Ken started to visit my father and hang around the garage as Dad was always doing men's things like de-coking exhaust valves and routine maintenance on his car. He and I got quite friendly and he started taking me out to vintage car meetings and other harmless activities. I guess I was about 16 or 17 when I first met him. Dad wasn't very complimentary about Ken and viewed him a bit like a hanger-on, but Ken was very willing to work alongside Dad in whatever he was needed to do. I would imagine there was a bit of hero-worship going on because my father was a test pilot at the time, and Ken was impressed by anything to do with courage. I can't fault him on that, he had guts, determination and application. But it is a coward that takes out his frustrations on 'the gentle sex'.

Our 'courtship' consisted of yet more outings and going out to visit friends and family where he, with his own brand of pepped-up narrative, would hold court. He had an excellent memory and instant recall but I never worked out definitively whether people found his tales interesting. Often, the stories were ones that I was involved in too, so I tried so many times in so many ways to make my own faltering inroads into becoming just like him, the life and soul, but he would do his best to belittle or talk over my modest efforts. Anyway, I didn't really like doing the rounds of other people's house by inviting ourselves, but people seemed genuinely pleased to see us. Since then, I have been occasionally handicapped by a stutter at those very times when I am put on the spot, or try and make my voice heard. And the absolute worst of all of this is that I have no recall at all of either jokes or, say, the components of a TV programme I saw last night, or the fine detail of a book I have just read. I remember the essence of it, and what it 'felt' like, but that is all. Do you think this is because I worked so hard to remember things and extricate myself from being in Ken's shadow, that my mind has rebelled, leaving me dangling in mid-air and appearing for all the world as though I am a few steps away from being a moron?

We eventually arranged our wedding and I don't think my mother could quite believe it. She was polite to him, but there was a decidedly icy *frisson* in the air. Dad said very little one way or the other. Ken's parents, mining stock from the Merthyr Vale area, were delighted as they thought of me as their own.

We had no proper sexual relations in the lead up to the wedding, save for the odd fumbings in the back of the car.

I somehow found out that I had a particularly tough hymen (perhaps it didn't like Ken either) so two weeks before the wedding I had to have a surgical procedure under a general anaesthetic to cut it. I was sore for a while, but determinedly bathed with salt water and the stitches eventually dissolved. It wasn't the best way to start married life.

There was just a single incident that should have warned me about the behaviour to follow once we were married. We were having a little game in his garage and I started tickling him, my hands everywhere. He looked around for something to restrain me and saw a length of blue nylon cord. Quick as a flash he looped this around my wrists and thus tied my hands behind my back. It was only a lark and we both laughed gaily. He let me go almost as quickly as he had tied me up. I thought nothing more of it, but evidently he had.

So the ceremony took place and we lived what I guess was a normal sort of life although I think he was a chauvinist long before it was fashionable. As far as I remember, he took care of all the household bills and directed today's menu for me to follow. We lived comfortably although I never knew how much he earned. He worked hard, applying himself well to handyman type of tasks; he even made our pine bed. I used to lose myself in the garden, I was proud of my house, but even more proud of the garden. Before we married, my father had bought me an old Austin 7. Anyway, Ken would not let me have it at our house, and requested me to sell it. I had a difficulty telling Dad that I had sold the car; I think he was a little hurt. He wasn't the only one – some disturbing behaviour from Ken had begun creeping into the sanctity of our marriage.

I will try and recall the next part, but please forgive me if it is a bit jerky and doesn't hang together very well. I went to bed one night, and he followed me up shortly afterwards. He opened the cupboard door and started rummaging, pulled out whatever it was and faced me, grinning triumphantly. I was fully awake and reading a book. He told me just to lie still because he wanted to try something. He took my book and put it on the floor, turned me on my tummy and then proceeded to tie me up with some rope. I couldn't see at the time, but afterwards when I rushed into the bathroom to try and be sick, I noticed the livid red pressure marks the rope had made in my soft flesh. I was disgusted, he was ebullient but apologetic. He just wanted to see what it was like, "it wasn't so bad, was it?" He said.

He slept like a baby and I remember gazing at his peaceful features and wishing that I, too, could sleep. As it was the first time it stuck in my memory because, no, it wasn't that bad, it didn't hurt too much, and although I felt massively disempowered at the time, I still had no reason to actually fear him. I wanted to believe it was a one-off, so we could both sweep it under the carpet and get on with the day-to-day mundanity of the rest of our life.

Why I couldn't sleep was that I had become painfully aware that this was the Second time, not the first, and if there was a third time, then a fourth would surely follow. The other awful thing was that, try as I might, I couldn't get over the fact that it had been pre-meditated. He must have gone out and got the rope and stowed it in the cupboard ready to use it on me. I couldn't help feeling uneasy about this unexpected development.

And sweep it under the carpet we did. My tears and fears soon went away as I changed jobs and directed a lot of energy into keeping my new one. He moved ever upwards in his profession and became quite well-respected among his peers. I made a few acquaintances at work, but mostly we still went out a'visiting friends. We rarely talked about emotions and feelings, just normal, everyday conversations, without much substance. I had little contact with my parents as they had moved from Bristol to Solihull, and I didn't go on many long trips. I do remember coming back from visiting them on one occasion and hearing the Beatles on the radio singing, 'She's leaving home.' I had to stop the car as I was crying so much. I rarely went anywhere without him, except to work, but he often would pick me up in the evenings. Looking back over what I have written, it looks like I was living under martial rule, but I don't think it felt so at the time. Everyone likes to feel they are free, independent spirits, don't they?

Before I could get my breath he repeated the process of a few weeks before. This time he used a much longer rope and wound it around and around me until I presume I resembled one of those African ladies who extend their necks to look beautiful by adding more and more rings. Yes, that was exactly what it was like. It was humiliating and degrading as when he had finished his eyes glistened and he surveyed me lasciviously. This time he was naked, and when he came into my line of vision I could see that he had an erection, and not just that, there was the occasional glistening drop falling off the end like a leaky overflow.

Strangely enough, I had not equated sex with my so far experience of this odd practice, and I don't think I did particularly in the future, but I have to say that as time progressed any little interest I may have had in his nether regions soon faded into oblivion. Actually I haven't the faintest idea what our sex life was like, I can sort of remember the odd mechanical action that was over in a few minutes. It puzzled me that, although he was obviously stimulated by degrading me in this way, he didn't force himself upon me afterwards. I certainly don't remember much about being held and cuddled so I am of the opinion as I look back now that such tender intimacy had no place in our relationship.

'It' was happening more and more frequently now, and seemed to be becoming a bit of a mind game. I would lie in bed beside him and only began to relax into sleep myself when his breathing became slower and deeper.

It wasn't that I was really safe then as I never knew just when he would wake up and it would happen again. I used to rummage around the house looking for what treats he had in store for me. I would find, for instance, a length of rope that hadn't been there the day before. I never let on and took great care not to disturb anything in the hiding place. I used to lie there, sweating but trying to remain calm, wondering whether he would tie me up as soon as he came to bed, or leave it until mid-way through the night, or until another day. I thought he didn't know that I knew his hiding places, but he must have done because, to give you an idea of the cat and mouse game he used to play, after a period of time I never found any more 'stashes'. He took to using hiding places elsewhere, like the garage and bringing them upstairs when he came to bed. I remember the times he would climb the stairs and I would peer through the cracks in the door opening to see if he was carrying anything with him. Even then he would have his hands behind his back as if he relished the act of surprising me at the last minute. He would also, when the mood took him, make a demonstrable show of being empty-handed (but remember, we never spoke about it), then rushing downstairs and fetching his chosen restraining device before I had chance to think about it.

Not that I could do anything about it.

He went out of his way to spring little surprises on me when I had persuasively lulled myself yet again into another false sense of security after a gap of a few days, or even weeks. But ever-present within my unconscious was the double whammy of 'when?' and 'what with?' There was no doubt about it, he was out to break my spirit. But why? The only verbal inkling I had of his simmering resentment was the time he had leapt on top of me, victorious that he had woken me from an already patchy slumber, waving some yellow cord aloft rather like a cowboy would a lasso. The usual MO¹ - shoved onto my tummy, pressed hard onto the bed, wrists bound separately then joined together, length of cord to the ankles - was finished off, this time, with a particularly vicious tug that pulled my wrists and ankles close together and he said, "This one's for your mother." A bit of a surprise; my mother had never been anything other than remotely pleasant to him. I thus searched and searched for the meaning of this over the many years I was with Ken. I am not aware of vaunting my middle class morality or even being as much aware of it as he was, but the ridiculous thing was that he was an intellectual snob. The rope from ankles to wrists would go vertically from the small of my back to the back of my thighs and I am shuddering as I remember how it used to cut into my bottom if I struggled or moved in any way. Sometimes I thought my shoulders would dislocate as he would pick me up by it and toss me, face up, on the bed. He would then just sit alongside me, not saying very much, just watching me in my discomfort.

He must have been a very warped individual indeed. It was bizarre really as by day we lived what was on the surface a normal life, and by night anything could happen.

The whole of the spare capacity in my brain continued to be dominated by that simple word, 'why?' and all the associated and myriad questions that I asked of myself and got an eerie silence for answers. I would examine what I had done that day, how I reacted to this or that, what I had said the day before and still it made no sense.

It started getting nasty and dangerous. Do you know how, sometimes, you can feel that something is so strange, so weird that it is unfathomable? It's as though you have been disassociated from your body and look down at the person you think is you, going through the motions, and talking in a voice that you don't recognise as your own? Was it because all of this was getting so inexplicable that I had to consign it to a box in my mind that was labelled 'Confidential Files – Open in 30 years'. Was that the only way I could keep going?

From the meagre information I have been able to give you thus far, you will probably be getting the idea by now that Ken was a bright chap, overtly confident but with a number of hang-ups probably related to feelings of social inadequacy. His father was an ex-miner who was an inspector in the tool shop at Rolls-Royce Engines, his mother a pinny-wearing housewife. They were lovely, generous people and lived in a respectable terrace of red brick on the seething outskirts of Bristol. They were worlds apart from my family. My mother didn't go out to work either, but I would imagine she would not have described herself as a housewife. She had a 'woman who does', Mrs Thornhill, and Mum raced around in a little red mini. Isn't it curious that I can even remember something as minor as Mum's car registration, 168 KHY, but I can't remember what Ken and I talked about, or how often we had sex. I am loathe to call it making love, although I believed I did love him; I was certainly a little in awe of him.

I can't delay this next bit any longer. In between the last two paragraphs, I got up and made myself coffee, did some vacuuming and cleaned the bathroom. Stupid behaviour for a grown woman. It is now time to open that box a little wider, the one that has been kept firmly locked for 30 years. Let's hope a wicked genie won't escape and cause riotous behaviour and mayhem just at the point when I think I am strong enough to cope, that really would be sod's law working overtime.

I don't know how it started, maybe I was crying out with the sharpness of the pain or something, although I was increasingly practised in the art of never showing my despair, or losing what I hoped was an inscrutable demeanour. Maybe this made him try even harder to unsettle me? Who knows. I mentioned earlier about Ken's predilection with large white hankies, they were an important part of his outfit and he always had one in his pocket. They were always ironed, folded and put away. One memorable night he selected one from the pile, telling me it was really special. I hadn't a clue what he was talking about, but I quickly found out. He bound my unresisting body hand and foot and to my utter repulsion he stuffed the hanky into my mouth, little by little. I began to gag and my eyes ran with tears; I could do nothing but try to expel it.

Annoyed that I had opposed him, he pushed it back in rather roughly and was obviously not quite happy with the result as he told me to wait a minute (I was rather a captive audience) while he went to fetch something. It seemed an interminable wait and I was morbidly curious to see what he had in his hands. It was a giant sticking plaster, one of the huge ones you get in a variety pack. He pulled off the paper and gently stuck it around my mouth. It effectively sealed the hanky inside my mouth.

Does this surprise you? I was utterly desolate as I lay there, my eyes following his every movement. I really and truly believed that I had experienced the very worst it could be. It was almost impossible to comprehend. He was a madman, or was he? Everything was meticulously planned, I could never fault his logic. As far as I knew, he wasn't suffering from delusions or voices in his head. I am sure if he was, he would have told me something about it. "Come on", was all he would say, "what's wrong with you; you're the odd one, lots of women like this". I was a little naïve, certainly not a woman of the world, but I still could not believe his statement, it just did not feel right. The interesting thing was that I never came across any porn magazines or anything that might determine that his behaviour toward me gave him sexual gratification. So how did he know that lots of women enjoyed it? He hadn't even had a serious girlfriend by the age of 27 when he first met me.

He let me get used to the sticking plaster first. It obviously pleased him and he would, again, spend time just watching me from a vantage point on the bed somewhere. Apart from the searing pain in my joints, I began to experience queasiness and had to learn very quickly how to stop myself being sick because, well, I can't even imagine what would have happened if I couldn't get into the right position to be sick, and even worse, the positioning of the hanky and sticking plaster would have meant that I would have inhaled my own vomit; not a nice thought. They were big tonsil-tickling hankies that dried my mouth and tongue and made it feel uncomfortably dry. I had to work hard to manufacture saliva and while Ken gazed at me, I would surreptitiously gather as much moisture as I could on the tip of my tongue and with small, hardly discernible darting movements, start loosening the plaster's grip with my tongue. I had to make myself an emergency air hole. Why? I hear you ask. Tears are rolling down my cheek as I try to answer your unspoken question. Ken, my beloved and faithful husband, had a new game, a logical progression from the hanky and sticky plaster one.

My heart is racing, and I am beginning to feel sick and breathless, how powerful these memories are proving to be. I needed an air hole because Ken, having trussed me up like a chicken, quietening me with the old hanky and sticky plaster routine, played the ultimate game. He would delicately but firmly pinch the end of my nose, with the accompanying words, "Let's see how long you last" and adding something to the effect that he believed I could last for about two minutes before losing consciousness. Resisting was fruitless as he would tighten his grip.

I don't actually know for how long he would stop me breathing in terms of minutes, but I never lost consciousness so presumably he didn't actually wish to dispose of me. I was more in danger of losing consciousness from the paralysing fear that gripped me. Now do you see why I needed an emergency air hole? I have to say I only ever made a tiny break in the seal of the sticking plaster as he would have noticed a larger one, so the amount of air I could pull through such a small opening was hard fought. He never seemed to hide the sticking plasters but always seemed to have a ready supply. The handkerchiefs were always there, stacked neatly and invitingly in the airing cupboard, the very handkerchiefs that I had de-snotted, scrubbed and ironed with such care.

Our life rumbled on. We bought a brand new car, had some nice holidays and were always out and about exploring antiquities around the country. It was fun driving round in the open-topped vintage car, it was very fast and he enjoyed speed and danger. We also changed the catamaran for a wooden dinghy and we often went out on one tide and stayed out exploring the Monmouthshire coast until the next flood tide came in. However, I couldn't fully relax surrounded by the infrastructure of ropes, inexplicably called 'sheets' in yacht-speak. Where I was a coward, Ken was a spirited sailor, and I'm sure that his seamanship was enhanced by the knots he had perfected on his life model.

We had two cats and Ken would play with them lovingly and gently. They were the cornerstone of our life and the question of children never, ever arose. Again, I haven't the faintest idea how we avoided the question, so what did we speak about? I still had a healthy respect for his intellect, humour, abilities and general *joie de vivre* that seemed to be getting more and more ebullient as time went on. I was going downhill.

Ken's 'treats' could stop without warning and equally, start without preamble. I never knew where I was with him. The longest gap between tyings-up was two months, and the most he had subjected me to were three, yes three, in one night. Once he started to restrict my breathing I began having palpitations and couldn't fully concentrate on my job. I had changed it again and by now I was a public relations officer for a large European packaging company. I was terrified of what he could do to me, and I didn't want to die, but I never let him see, never pleaded for my life. He began to get rougher and rougher. Can you imagine being tied, bound and gagged and being literally thrown into the bed? Not only that but (in the days before duvets) he would throw the bedclothes on top of me and then sit on me. It was dark and airless in there but at least I could covertly try and breathe a bit through the plaster. This became the 'usual' way he tortured me. Tortured sounds such a strong word for it, and I have never used it before this time, strange as that may seem. What a legacy! I am terrified of the dark, I am terrified of enclosed spaces, I am terrified of having a cold and not being able to breathe properly. I have never been able to smoke because of airflow restriction. I admire anyone who can.

It was about this time I decided to pluck up courage to go and see the doctor. I cried and babbled as little as I could, but emotions were quite near the surface. I gave him only the edited highlights, his face gave away little, his words even less. He decided to palm me off onto his health visitor, who simply could not, would not or was not equipped to help. Their complete lack of bedside manner made me feel as though I was the pervert, getting some sort of weird thrill from exposing myself in this very public way. I felt tainted and tatty. They gave me some tranquillisers to go away. I really hope that things are different these days. The tranquillisers slowed me down and I enjoyed the effect of taking more than the prescribed dose, the feeling of everything floating, but I am not sure they helped, just numbed a little bit. I just learned techniques of how to cope better, how to become even more self-reliant. After all, there was no one to whom I could unburden myself. I was living on a knife-edge.

The word 'knife-edge' took on a sinister reality.

Ken expanded his repertoire to include a heavy duty chain and padlock that he produced on my birthday, March 23rd. He was a reasonably generous man and I craned my neck to see what my present was. I don't know whether I can adequately describe what I felt when my eyes rested on his gift. He told me he had been wondering what to get me and had bought this from the local hardware shop. "Shall we try it now or later?" I remember him asking. It was heavy and cold and it dug in to me, but a saving grace was that I wasn't gagged this time. Obviously he was preoccupied with the novelty of the chain and he would always save it for special occasions.

Weeks elapsed, even months, I can't remember with any clarity, and am still amazed that, now prompted, I can remember other incidents as though they were yesterday. He wanted to try something new, he said. He was terse and angry and even now as my brain seeks early closure on this particular incident, I still cannot comprehend what caused it. I was reasonably intuitive, though not as finely tuned as I am now, and my every waking hour seemed to revolve around preserving Ken's *status quo*, my senses on red alert the moment something altered. I wasn't bossy, I never lost my temper, my only 'crime' was passivity. Such is the power of these thoughts that I have now got a sharp pain going from my right eye all the way up my head and down my neck. It's saying 'stop now, haven't you recalled enough? No-one's going to be interested in hearing such a pathetic story'. This time, I refuse to listen and I must see this one through. It may have value for someone reading this, but it is certainly helping me.

Ken was angry again. He brought several different types of rope and stumped up the stairs, dragging them behind him for ultimate effect. I hadn't really considered the metal loop on the loft hatch as my next tormentor. I am sure his anger accounted for the superhuman strength he would need to grapple with my inert, bound body to position it below the loft. He then somehow managed to thread the various ropes through the loop and began heaving me aloft.

He didn't stop until I was dangling some 4ft in the air with legs and arms bearing the full brunt of my bodyweight. I was surprised that one or both of my slender little wrists didn't break under the strain. There I remained at his disposal for about half an hour and I felt a real disgust as he ran his fingers along my quivering body. The wheals on my wrists and ankles were deeper than usual and were still very evident the next day. I cried ferociously, I wondered whether there was any justice in the world. I wondered just how long I could go on for, because I seemed to be living in a permanent haze of aches, bruises and head pains. Because I was so upset, Ken allowed himself to show some remorse and I was quite unprepared for the rush of compassion that I felt towards him. You want to believe so much when someone promises that they won't ever do it again, and for a while he didn't.

But life soon settled down to the routine, familiar pattern of debasement, or it "eased down to a typhoon" as my beloved Pops would say. The mental torture for me was far worse than being physically hurt. One evening I found out something rather wonderful about physical pain. I think I will call it damage limitation as something happened either subliminally or chemically that caused the pain threshold to be breached but there it stayed, it didn't get any worse. Ken had used the African method (as I was to call it), hands and feet bound separately then coil upon coil of thick rope up and down my body. Thus I could, sort of, stand up. He was terse and said not a word to me as he pushed and shoved me towards the stairs. I was gagged so I couldn't scream out. As I was poised sideways at the top of the stairs I remember being so frightened of the unknown; it was what he didn't say that terrified me. Why? What had I done and how can I stop it happening again? He punched me a glancing blow in the stomach and over I toppled. I bumped down two or three stairs and he swung his leg first one, then the other, kicking me down the rest until I ended up in an uncoordinated heap. There I stayed while he made himself a cup of something or other. My full weight bore down on whatever part of my anatomy that was underneath, so I couldn't move to get more comfortable. But, having braced myself for the very worst, I found that there was nothing after 'excruciating' on the pain monitor. It numbed and allowed me to stay there in what I can almost say was an altered state of consciousness. The bruises on my thighs and arms particularly were the worst I'd ever had.

It has occurred to me many times, and I would love to think it was true, when I hear of those absolutely tragic cases of young girls being raped and murdered, that maybe during that time of extreme pain a similar switch may have been flicked in their brain to anaesthetise them too. The mental agony of waiting and watching I was never able to improve on, except that perhaps I developed more techniques to show Ken he hadn't hurt me that much. The thought of being a cringing, quivering wreck, a victim, was just too much to bear for me. But the defence mechanism into which I had put so much strategic energy may just have been my undoing.

It wasn't the first time I received 'punishment' from a man.

My father was stern and rather uncommunicative and used to get so angry about my laziness and untidiness, that he would resort to draconian measures to discipline me. These would consist of piling all the 'rubbish' in my bedroom into my bed and pulling over the covers; dragging me upstairs by my hair and then forcing me under the cold water tap to 'knock some sense' into me. Did it? No it didn't. I became more obdurate and my body language let him know that he hadn't won, I was still a free spirit and wouldn't be shackled. Deciding I wasn't learning as fast as I could be and fearing I may fail the 11+, he got me up viciously early in the mornings and had me run round our acre plot twice, against the clock. Armed with a ruler, he would then quick fire mental arithmetic questions at me and bang the ruler on the table for the answer. I lost the battle by passing the silly exam but felt I sort of won the war by digging my heels in about performing well at Grammar School. Mealtimes were another opportunity for a head to head confrontation. "Lynda, eat that cabbage/pork chop fat/sprouts/chicken skin." "No, I don't like it." "Well, you'll just have to sit there until you do." So we did.

Although lazy, I had an inordinate amount of fight in me, feisty they would call it now, but I never struggled against my captor, Ken. I did once or twice at the outset, but was smart enough to realise that the subsequent loss of sensation in my extremities coupled with the bruising was not worth it, it really wasn't. It was just what he was waiting for, in some ways like my father was, so he could have an excuse to switch into brutal mode. So, with whatever strength I could muster, I would stifle and subdue my reactions.

Heaven only knows how it started but Ken decided he wanted to learn to play the bagpipes after getting interested in Scottish classical bagpipe music, piobaireach. He was Welsh through and through, so it was a strange alliance. My grandfather was Scottish and I found this style of music strangely haunting and elegant. In a curious way I found Ken's homage a compliment because he knew that I was proud of my Scottish roots. He ordered a set and we drove to Edinburgh just to collect it. It cost an inordinate amount of money and it was a nice feeling as I gazed upon the instrument, it was quite a work of art and the bag was encased in my grandfather's tartan, the Leslie. Learning to play the bagpipes should really have been something one undertook in a vast auditorium, or in a field somewhere, or at least away from human habitation. Yet Ken practised daily in the house. Yes, I know we had a detached house, but there was no room I could go to escape the intrusive screeching, except to go out for a few hours. He wouldn't have liked that. He liked me close by so I could hear how well he was doing. It was a shame that it didn't have a volume control on it and I was surprised that not one neighbour complained. I didn't complain either. Not just that, he would tape himself and play it over and over on his sophisticated Uher reel to reel tape recorder, to check for flaws in his performance. Full marks to him, it was a daunting task when he couldn't even, at the start, read music.

I taped one of his virtuoso performances and on a rare visit to my mother played the tape to her. She was even closer to her Scottish roots; the sound of the pipes always made her misty-eyed. Unfortunately for Ken, but not for me and Mum, I let the tape over-run and it went on to play an earlier performance. The performance when Ken stood at the stairs in mock march mode playing "Scotland the Brave". It started very well until he missed his footing three steps from the bottom and the synchronised squashing of the bag and its forced exhalation squeezed the last remnants of sound from the base drone as its voice rose in pitch like a anguished tomcat then trailed off amid Ken's mutterings and cursings. It was amazing how melodic such a sound was to both my mother and me. She remembers very little about Ken now, but still dabs tears from her eyes when she recalls how well he played that day! Such an affront to his dignity gave Ken the opportunity of being a victim himself. Perhaps that was one of the occasions when he was rougher than usual with me? Perhaps the stairs were extracting their revenge? It would be nice to think so.

I remain convinced that mental torture is the worst form of pain, and of course all the repressive dictators and regimes would agree. The very nadir of it all, for me, was when I was denied my basic human right to breathe. I sort of remember counting one thousand two thousand three thousand while my tongue was trying to make me a lifeline. When it first started happening it was a reflex action to struggle, but he would really try so much harder to wrestle back control. What else could I do but try and master the technique of shallower breathing while my heart was racing almost out of control. And what sort of coward would deny me breath while using their superior strength to deny me movement too? It seemed like a bit of an unfair advantage.

Convinced I would end up dead at some stage, I got a black-handled steak knife from the kitchen and secreted it under my pillow. He never found it because he never stripped the bed, that was my prerogative. It just shows the extent of my cloudiness of thought as, had I ever used it to cut my bonds before he came back in the room, he would have become crazed with anger, and although I can't now predict how he would have acted, believe me it would have been to my detriment. If I had managed to reach it during one of the two minute silences and somehow managed to plunge it into him, I would have to have made sure he was dead because he would almost certainly have killed me. The steak knife was to remain under my pillow for the last two years of my life with Ken.

How could it be that someone gutsy as I had been all through my growing up, could be reduced to a malleable heap that offered no resistance? Was I as strong as I thought? Perhaps my strength went into preserving my own status quo so, after a few faltering starts, I could display a sublime persona that minimised Ken's triumph. If I was that gutsy why didn't I leave him? Had he been a drunkard and I was being ritually hit about on his returns from the pub I would have understood this behaviour pattern and left him a lot, lot sooner. He didn't drink to excess, he wasn't a womaniser.

The end game was short, reasonably sharp, and completely out of my hands. I was determined to give Ken a fair hearing, but seven years was a long time even for a balanced person like me. Despite the tranquillisers, I began to dip down more and more into depression and the intensity and frequency of the abuse seemed to be escalating, or maybe I wasn't handling it as well as I used to. I was worn down and for the last month or so beginning to cry uncontrollably.

After quite a few weeks of this, I phoned my mother and she sent my father to pick me up. I risked Ken's wrath by saying I was going away for a few days to see my parents, who had by now moved to about an hour and a half's drive away. I remember looking all around at everything I had built up over seven years - the detached house, antique furniture, well stocked garden, dinghy, vintage car, new car, lovely kitchen, books, plus cats Isca and Deva, knowing I was probably escaping for ever. But all that was a small price to pay for walking away with my body and mind, not quite, together, but salvageable. I never went back, but received tearful phone calls and an abundance of letters. I missed my home and the things that gave me the security of knowing I belonged somewhere.

I gave a full and frank testimonial to a solicitor to start divorce proceedings but it was so horrific he, like the rest of them on the other side of the fence, looked at me in disbelief and obviously wondered why I had stayed so long. In the end, I allowed Ken to divorce me for a spurious adultery as he begged me not to reveal all. I never saw anyone from that time again. A dilemma ensued afterwards. Do I 'tell' on him to the authorities, let those closest know the full story, or keep mum to save his family shame and pain; I chose the latter. Nobody knew why I escaped from Tabernacle Road on 15th March 1976. Perhaps they're still wondering, they may even read this story.

I don't 'do depression'. Depression is something other people get, I used to say smugly and yes, I had managed to maintain a reasonably stable lifestyle since that time. So, thirty years on, it took me a little by surprise sitting in that caravan in the middle of a field when I started experiencing snatched remembrances that I had thought were gone forever. I phoned my mother from the caravan and relayed some of the foregoing to her, saying I believed I was a 'little depressed' at the moment. She said I must act quickly before "it takes hold", go to the doctor, get some Prozac. I said no Mum, I won't need that, I'm savouring the experience. When you start analysing from a dark position you soon realise that there is nothing left of any substance, and you begin to surmise that you have built your whole being on something that may or may not even exist.

Mum gave me a small piece of the jigsaw. She said she remembered clearly how I was when dad brought me back from Bristol. I would tell her nothing about what had happened and she remembers me sitting at the window, immobile, as she set out to go to the cash and carry (she had a pub).

I didn't want to explain anything that could then allow her to influence me or any decisions I was about to make. I just wanted to gather my thoughts and get myself straight. I was still in the window when she returned and I handed her a letter I had written Ken asking her to read it and saying that it would explain everything. She cried and gave me a cuddle. We never spoke again in any detail about it.

So why did I allow myself to be Ken's victim, his whipping boy? This is the perennially posed question those on one side of the fence ask exasperatedly of that silent minority, the abused women on the other side of the fence. I could say that 30 years ago it was not as easy for abused women, I think it was before the gallant Erin Pizzey somehow forced these hitherto not-talked-about issues into the open and started up the first hostel for battered women. It seems quite inexplicable to those who have never had experienced such dehumanising acts that we women can continue to exist amid such carnage, while somehow managing to juggle emotions, jobs and families. Having had none, I couldn't even say that I was staying for the sake of the children. Was it because I wanted sympathy, people to feel sorry for me and think of me as brave and strong? I don't think so, because it wasn't something I relayed to anyone; I was a bit ashamed.

But have things really changed that much? There are still too many deaths from abuse. Programmes like Jeremy Kyle feature victims just like me who protest that their husbands/boyfriends/lovers are abusing them or are serial adulterers. I would be the first to stand up and say that because they stay put they are disempowering themselves and empowering the abuser. They can cite a million reasons why they can't leave etc, and I was doing this too in reasoning that I needed to find out 'why' for myself by staying, observing and analysing. My passivity regarding such prolonged and extensive abuse was taken by Ken as tacit acceptance.

So why didn't I talk to him at the outset and tell him what he was doing was hurting me, it was without my consent and therefore wrong? I could have saved myself seven years of no progress in that direction because I never found out the answer!

So, having laboured through this story what do you think now? I am sure that most of you would make the informed decision that this terrifying jigsaw still has a piece missing; the piece that explains 'why'. But why should you get off so lightly when I am still here, thirty years on, still wrestling with this conundrum?

It is beyond my ken and the conclusion is that there is no conclusion. All I know is that I had a box labelled 'confidential' that lay like a time-bomb inside me, it was set to open after a significant period of safe time, rather like sensitive state papers. All it needed was the trigger to detonate it, and much as my psyche resisted any sort of depression, once I had again reached rock bottom, it was set off at a timely moment.

Although it didn't seem timely to me at the time, my horror at sitting down to write this story has abated, my headache lifted. Today will be the first true day of life without Ken.



15th March 1969

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