

**OLDER WOMEN SPEAK UP
VIOLENCE IN THE HOME BOO
ORDER FORM**

Older Women Speak Up invite you to send for a free booklet of violence against women in the home.

Older women are empowered by telling their own stories. The booklet older women's stories in their own words, compiled and edited by Margaret (with funding from the Department of Women, NSW).

NAME

ADDRESS

ORGANISATION

Is the booklet for an individual or organisation? _____

Number of booklets required _____

Please send the order form to
Older Women Speak Up
1A Liverpool Street, Bundena NSW 2

OLDER WOMEN SPEAK UP: VIOLENCE IN THE HOME PROJECT

QUESTIONNAIRE: WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE BOOKLET?

It would be a great help to our work to know what you think about the booklet.

We promise to keep confidential all the information you give us.

1. **In what ways could the booklet be improved?**

2. **Please circle the words you think best describe the booklet.**

Horrifying	Nothing special	Part of my job	Depressing
Educational	Rings true	Not interesting	Very moving
Amazing	Hard to understand	Like my own experiences	Hard to believe
Useful	News to me	Helpful to me	Helpful to victims
Helpful to service workers	Helpful to the community		

3. **Is violence or abuse against older women in the home an important problem?**

VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	FAIRLY IMPORTANT
NOT VERY IMPORTANT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	

4. **Has anyone close to you experienced violence or abuse of any kind in the home?**

YES	UNCERTAIN	NO
-----	-----------	----

We are interested to hear your ideas about violence or abuse against older women. If you have had violent experiences yourself, please tell us a little about them.

5. **Have you yourself experienced violence or abuse of any kind in the home?**

Yes	Uncertain	No
-----	-----------	----

6. **If so, what kinds of violence or abuse have you experienced as a child?**

PHYSICAL EMOTIONAL SEXUAL FINANCIAL SOCIAL NONE OTHER

7. **What kinds of violence or abuse have you experienced as a younger woman?**

PHYSICAL EMOTIONAL SEXUAL FINANCIAL SOCIAL NONE OTHER

8. What kinds of violence or abuse have you experienced as an older woman?

PHYSICAL EMOTIONAL SEXUAL FINANCIAL SOCIAL NONE
 OTHER (please specify) _____

For women who have experienced violence or abuse

a. Who have you told?

No one Friends Family Police
 Women's group Other (please specify) _____

b. How did you manage to survive?

By leaving Activities Support of friends
 Other (please specify) _____

c. What is your situation now?

Live alone New partner Still damaged Job helping others
 Other (please specify) _____

OLDER WOMEN SPEAK UP: VIOLENCE IN THE HOME PROJECT

Even if you have not experienced violence yourself, please help the project by filling in this form. There are no right and wrong answers. Just write whatever comes into your head [whatever you first think of].

Violence

It makes me

In my experience

The first time

My age was

The effect on me

Later on

Men

Women

As an older woman

I thought

But

The worst part

To survive I

Changing the situation

I told

Help

Now

I wish

Further comments – please use the back of this page

.....

.....

9. We intend to publish a large book of stories like these. Do you have a story to contribute?

Yes No Uncertain

10. If you answered 'yes' to question 9, provide your name, address and phone number and we will contact you.

Name Phone

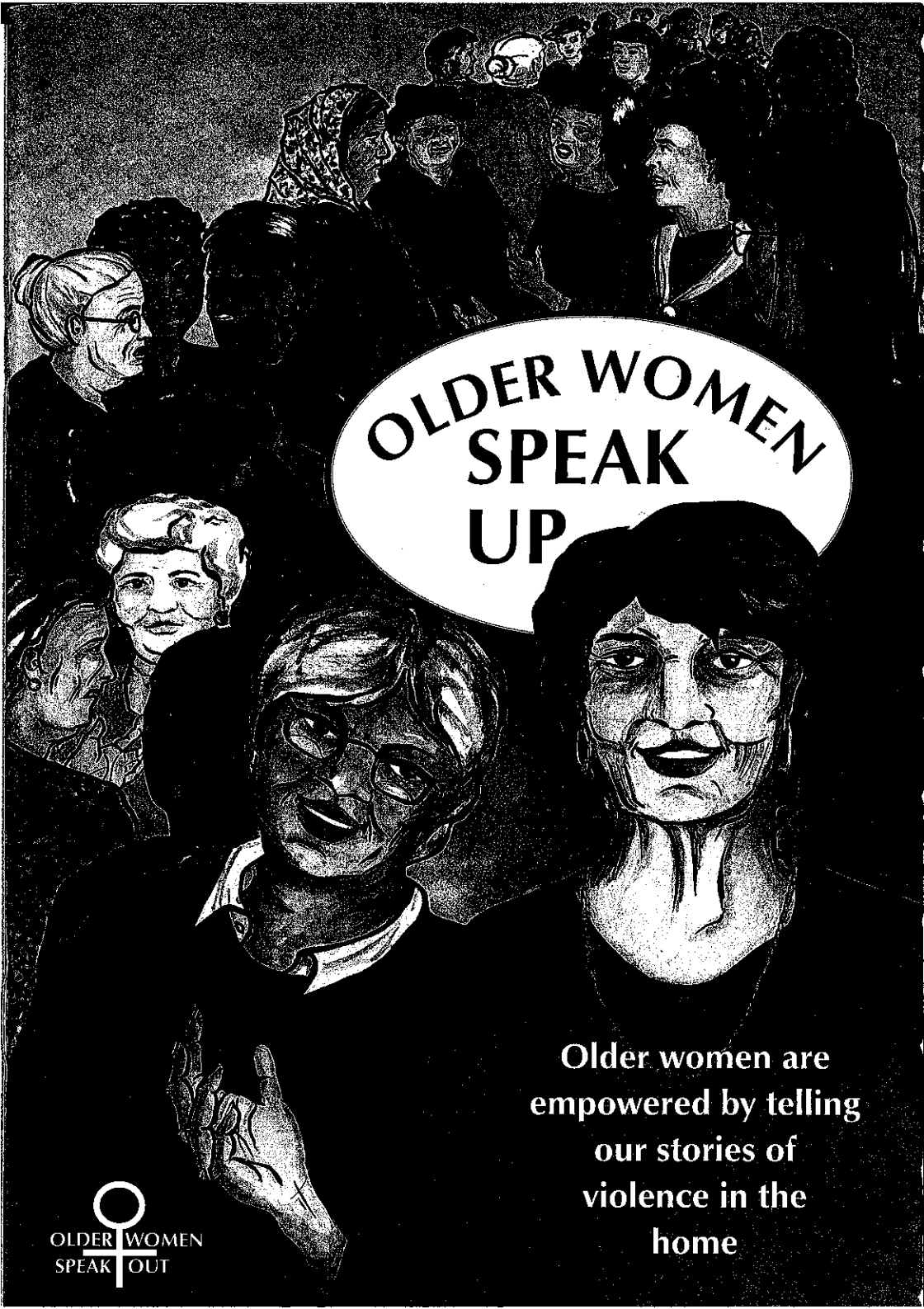
 Address

or, send in your story (on paper, by phone, fax, by audio cassette, or computer disc) to:
 Older Women Speak Up
 1A Liverpool Street, Bundeena NSW 2230

NOTE: The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Executive Officer, Claire Kaspura (tel: 02 46203641). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill in the questionnaire.

Please send it to:
 Older Women Speak Up, 1A Liverpool Street, Bundeena NSW 2230



**OLDER WOMEN
SPEAK
UP**

Older women are
empowered by telling
our stories of
violence in the
home


OLDER WOMEN
SPEAK OUT

Older Women Speak Up

Violence in the Home

Compiled and Edited by
Margaret Sargent and Jane Mears

Publisher:
University of Western Sydney

with funding from the
Department for Women, New South Wales
through the Women's Grants Program 1999-2000



Department for Women



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful for funding from the Department for Women Small Grants Program to Older Women Speak Up, and held under the auspices of the University of Western Sydney.

We wish to thank Karen Vance for design and artwork.

► **Most of all we thank all the older women who courageously spoke up and told the stories of their own experiences of violence in the home.**

For free copies of this booklet write to:

Older Women Speak Up
1A Liverpool St
Bundeena NSW 2230

Published by the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur
PO Box 555, Campbelltown, NSW 2560 Australia.

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Sydney, August 2000.

ISBN: 1863418881

Do you have a story to tell? If so please
contact us on (02) 9523 9558

We promise to keep all stories
confidential.

THE BOOKLET

This booklet is made up mainly of stories of violence as they were told by older women to groups of other older women. The stories tell of all kinds of violence - physical, emotional, sexual, social and financial. They expose the terrible hurt and fear that women have experienced and the devastating consequences of living with violence. The stories also portray tremendous courage, strength and endurance. They tell of the creative strategies adopted to survive. They show how we are empowered to change our own lives and ultimately the lives of older women everywhere. The themes that emerged from the stories are listed below.

THE PROJECT

The Violence in the Home Project is the work of a group of older women who believe it is time for us to speak up about the violence in our lives. We give talks to older people's and women's organisations, facilitate group discussions about violence, carry out interviews and invite contributions of stories from older women all over Australia. We shall continue these activities.

When we have enough material, we intend to publish a larger book of stories told by older women. This is one way we can help each other to understand ourselves, and to survive, and work for change.

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CHARMING-OUTSIDE-INSIDE-A-DEVIL

▶ OLGA

Everyone thought it was Darby and Joan, they thought we were so happy. He was one of those people, charming-outside-inside-a devil, and I'm sure it was to do with sex all the time, and I got so sick and tired of it. Women of all ages looked at him and said, 'Aren't you lucky, such a lovely husband!' While I was carrying the baby, he used to walk past the girls and whistle them, and then he'd look back, and he'd say, 'They're looking at me.' I was so self-conscious.

My mother and sister hated him when they first saw him and called him a Casanova, but he wove his charm round them as well as me, and eventually they believed him more than they believed me.

When we came here to Australia to live, he warned me before we got on the boat not to speak to anybody. 'You don't need friends,' he said. Well I do. He came to my cabin, said he wanted me to do something that would please him - sex, in other words. I was reluctant. He kicked me, swung the door in my face, and then he didn't speak to me for the whole month's journey.

Later, when we settled here, I was sitting watching TV in the lounge, and he was sitting there too. He said, 'What are you looking like that for?' I had to say 'Yes' to everything he said, and did so because of what he did. But on this

occasion I answered back. He called me a slut, and said I was dragged up from the gutter, a prostitute - terrible things. He came over to me and I froze. He knocked me under the jaw. After that I had to go to the dentist, and he had to file one of my teeth down after that. I raced into the toilet crying my eyes out. Then it was as if nothing had happened. I was watching TV but not knowing what I was watching, and I felt absolutely frightened almost to freezing. I was proud of my teeth.

We'd go out, go dancing, and enjoy each other's company when we were out. Sex was flaunted at me. 'Oh look at her, isn't she lovely?' he'd say. 'I think I'll have a dance with her.' And he'd go up the room kissing her, he loved it. And I felt so ashamed. I think he did it deliberately to make me unhappy. It gave him enjoyment. He was a sadistic person. That was his nature. Once he got out what looked like a revolver. It turned out to be a starting pistol, but in my anxiety I thought it was real. But, thank God, my son was walking up the back steps and he put the revolver away.

He loved women. For example he made my life a misery when I came out of hospital after having the baby because he couldn't get what he wanted from me. I went out one day, ready to commit suicide, intending to throw myself and the baby under a bus. That's the state I was in.

I stayed with him so long because he'd go down on his bended knees and ask forgiveness. And, foolish me, I used to forgive him, and say, 'We'll try again.' It lasted for

nearly forty years of this. My nerves were always in a bad state. I was always crying when I got to work. The rest of the staff pacified me. Then I'd start work and forget my troubles. I felt absolutely drained, annoyed, sorry for myself, all the moods. People didn't talk about it in those days. You just bottled it all up.

When I look back, I didn't have the gumption to do something to get out of the life I was living. I was able to work, I could have put the child in a kindergarten before he started school. I could have somehow managed to survive. But I was too scared. In recent years I've made friends with my ex-husband. We are both now very old and I have two lovely grandchildren. They say old age mellows people. We talk and get on quite well but over the phone only. This is the first time I've ever told anyone all these things. I'm so old, I don't know how much longer I have - but if I'd gone from this world I think I'd have regretted not telling somebody my story.

DILYS

I grew up experiencing domestic violence. My mother's still living in violence, they've been together for 50 years. Back in 1967 I gave birth to my eldest daughter. I got married in July, I married a man, a white man. People must understand that being Koori is not easy. You've got to live your life by the laws that are laid down for you. Plus you have to follow other laws. Anyway I get married to this

creep. Over the year he turned out to be a child molester in this town, which dragged me down.

I thought how was I going to fight this man. If it was another woman, I could handle it, and he always used to say to me, 'If you were a white woman you would go to a psychiatrist.' So I was under Dr M at the time. I was a nervous freak. I'd been through every nerve tablet there was to calm me down - it didn't work. My strength had to come through myself. I couldn't get any help from my Mum or Dad. He was her little snowy-headed boy. I thought, 'How can this be?' I was supposed to be the daughter. He was supposed to be the son-in-law. And yet I was blamed for everything because I used to take a drink. The day I married I was 17 and had never touched grog till that day, and he had one jammed in my hand. And when I got married it was just like asking for a loaf across the counter. I was just treated at the registry like the way that I am, a black woman.

They put him in gaol for three years. There was nowhere I could go for counselling. My Mum and Dad wouldn't hear any bad about him. But in court, seven or eight kids were affected. I wasn't allowed to testify against him because I was his wife.

He interfered with all the little kids - but they made him the scout master. I went and joined the cubs. I thought maybe that'd help pull the family together. But he wasn't a man to be pleased that way. He had to take the little boys.

I knew it all along. I said to him in the end that I hated it. I had to leave my eight children. I had to get out of this town. I said, 'I have to get away from you very soon, or I'm gonna stab you in your sleep. Or I'll get a gun from somewhere and I'll shoot you....'

And now I've got four of my kids working in the education system and I teach at TAFE.

IDENTIFYING VIOLENCE

▶ AMY

I didn't realise until about two years ago that I was in an abusive relationship, not physical violence, but being put down all the time. Being told I was too stupid to do this or that, not given money. I was given £20 per week, and I had to feed, clothe and do everything around the house... but I didn't understand. About two years ago, I met someone who said being in an abusive relationship is not just being punched and I thought, that's me.

▶ BETTY

I grew up with domestic violence - I knew what it was - because I've seen my mother with broken jaw, broken nose, black eyes, broken ribs, all sorts of things. I determined that when I grew up that was never going to happen to me. So I married someone who never hit me. My marriage was not physically violent, but financially,

socially, emotionally, sexually, in every other way it was. I was cut off from my family, I was taken away. When people turned up at my house, my husband, who was a very large man, six foot four, made them feel unwelcome and eventually they just stopped coming. I was even taken to the North Coast with my children, and we were living out on the farm a long way from town. He never hit me. I had no idea I was living in violence. But he'd say I was stupid and that nobody loved me, 'Your mother doesn't love you, your father doesn't love you', all that sort of stuff. It just wore me down. I decided not to have any more children. Eventually I realised that my marriage was over.

HOW SELF ESTEEM IS UNDERMINED

► ELIZA

Maybe we start this cycle with an abusive husband, where we get a bit timid, and we're domineered by other people and we can't stand up for ourselves.

► JEAN

And I know now that I was not a grovelling worm on the floor as I was led to believe. It was illogical, but you cannot get out of the mould. At home you're one thing. Outside you're an entirely different person. No way do people outside know what it was like inside. I can sympathise with you ladies, even with physical violence I can sympathise, but none of us know exactly what goes on inside when these things happen.

► GWEN

I was working in the soft furnishings department at one of the major department stores here, and I had to spend thirty thousand dollars every month on the firm's behalf to buy fabrics plus do quoting for diplomatic residences and the like. I had no self esteem. I had to become the person in the department at work, and I'd become the doormat when he was home. At home I'd get told, 'You don't know what you're talking about.' You're told you've got a warped mind - you're made to feel you're a doormat - especially on current affairs or anything like that. That happened to me. He would sulk because I didn't always do what he wanted - and all those remarks made me feel dreadful.

I had gone without money so that my superannuation contributions could be paid. If anything ever happened to him, I was told I would be a rich woman, with superannuation and everything. Then we were divorced - I was one of the first statistics in the family. With other women I fought madly, tried to get the superannuation after the divorce. I got absolutely nothing. Then I developed this very serious heart complaint. However, after that I became wholly me, and now I'm still fighting causes. But I can't take any position where I'd have stress. It's emotional, psychological violence. You're told you're not good enough to do anything.

what he has tried to do. If anything ever happens to me they'll know where to go. I mean I know what he's like - if I see him have four or five beers at the club, then I go home. Because I know, I don't care if he's been married to this other woman for years, I know that if he does his block, it's going to be me he goes after. I worry about it for a couple of days and then think 'Oh well there's nothing I can do about it'. I've lived with it for a long while.

By telling people my story - even though there's a network as such I can ring if something happens - I feel like there's a safety net. The sad part is that I came to the area first and he's followed. He even goes to the same doctor as I do, and joined the same clubs. I've got people's numbers punched into the phone. If he came to the door I'd just close the door and lock it. I wouldn't say I'm fully protected but I'm protected enough that he would have a little bit of bother. For seven years he had a contract out to kill me. But I'm not going to let him worry me or I'd be back where I was years ago. When he used to come home from work I'd get butterflies in my stomach - I hated it, I don't intend to go back to any of that again, whatever happens.

People have asked me how I felt when he tried to kill me. I was just dead calm. People say their life goes before their eyes, that didn't happen. I was just dead calm. I wasn't frightened of him, I wasn't scared, just dead calm. I've learned to survive, and I've survived it all, so I'll keep

going. There's nothing that anyone can do to stop it. I'd advise other women to get out as quickly as you can. Don't do what most of us women do and wait until the kids grow up. Don't think along those lines, especially in this day and age, when you can get help. It took me a long time to be able to talk about it. I don't think I could ever write my story on paper. But now I think it is important. I think if people hear my story, it might make it easier for you to cope with yours.

SURVIVING AND GETTING HELP

SALLY

To survive I live alone.

DILYS

But I went on and on and eventually got out of a very emotionally abusive relationship and got divorced. And that was the biggest day of my life. I was scared, I was shaking. But the day after the divorce, I felt I could fly. Everything was off my shoulders. I felt great. He never hit me, it was nothing like that. He just didn't want to touch me. If he gave me money, he'd drop it in my hand. If you've ever experienced not being touched, you'd know, it was awful. We had no communication whatsoever. It was the children that said, 'Leave him - get a life of your own'. It was only when the youngest one was in high school, that I did so, after 39 years. It was such a relief, I couldn't believe it.

▶ **MONA**

I just decided I'd had enough of f - alcoholics. I'd lived this way for 56 years, and I just decided I'd had enough of people who drink. I left. He was quite happy for me to go. I wanted to leave anyway, it was my decision. He's just got this side of him which is absolutely ghastly. The same as my father. My mother couldn't control him. Now we are starting to talk and he's been to see the mediator we saw earlier in the year. The government gives you a bit of money. I'm managing, it's surprising how you can live when you haven't got much money.

▶ **NONNY**

With one supporter, I did it. I walked away. Since then I've had lots of support. At the time I left, I was a new member of the Older Women's Network, and there wasn't a group. You only need one supporter. The more the merrier though, the bigger the group and the more the better, but I can do with just one.

▶ **MARTHA**

There is no real community support for survivors of domestic violence. Counselling costs money. I attended two 12-week workshops and paid \$360. Mediation for a property settlement was helpful because it sorted the settlement out fairly but cost us about \$60 each, after which I had to use a solicitor (because of the domestic violence) which cost me \$1500. I still had to find at least

\$1200 for the divorce. The victim files and pays for the divorce while the offending man gets a free decree nisi. A free gift for domestic violence. Where is justice? The victim has to pay for the honour of being the reason for professional workers' existence and for their wealth. Domestic violence counselling should be free.

▶ **NANCY**

I asked for help. I knew once I was back in civilisation, I would get help at a refuge. He came home one night in December and tried to break our youngest daughter's neck, after calling her and me filthy, filthy names. All this took place in front of our five year old grandchild. His father had left them when he was about six weeks old and he idolised his grandfather. I called the police and he was locked up. We were in a traumatised state and the right policeman came. I had started going to Al Anon, that helped and I was seeing a psychiatrist.

I thought I was too old to leave and start again on my own. Every day seemed a lifetime, but really the emotions were all so mixed, and running every which way. I was in a whirlpool. I will be 57 this August. I look back, so much festered out and it isn't even two years. I feel I am getting better, I feel much stronger, and I'm looking better. God saw to it that I got away. So much has happened. I want to be able to help anyone in domestic violence. I want to be able to say, I have been there, it gets better. Don't stay for the sake of anybody. There is help. Don't give up, we will help you.

► CATE

My man was very, very mean. I'd done without all our married lives. He queried every bit of money. When the kids asked him for things, poor little things, they used to ask him for money for sport and for school. But it didn't make any difference. He just hated giving money out, and still does. Anyway in the end I left him. It took me thirty odd years to do it. It was over money, for a battery for the car. He wanted to buy a second-hand one. I wanted a brand new one. We had this argument, and I left him. The battery did it.

I didn't have enough money for a flat. But the superannuation was coming due, and I thought, 'I don't have to put up with this now. We don't have to sell the house and divide it. There's some money there'. I went down to the Women's Centre and they made an appointment for me to see the solicitor. I ended up getting his superannuation. I was out of that house and living up the top of town six months later. I have this nice little house. It was real good. I got my freedom. And I've never been sorry. I'm like my sister, I'm having the best time of my life since I left him.

DEPRIVED OF MONEY AND HOME

► GENEVIEVE

I was abused physically and emotionally and was so totally shocked. I sat up all night, unable to believe this had happened. Eventually, I signed, under great duress, a deed

giving him the house. The children and myself had never had any of the chattels or personal things from the house. I was just too afraid of him. At this time he started ringing me reminding how easy it would be for him to 'just remove the children'. My solicitor seemed to not care and I am horrified at how blase this firm was.

► HANNAH

My friend had a gorgeous house and garden, and her wayward son got married and persuaded her to put sixty percent of the capital into his house. They built a four bed-room house, and she was to live in a little cottage on the property. They were really horrible to her even when she started living with them before the house was built. Finally she moved into the little house. There were two garages there and they wouldn't allow her to use the second garage, or to use anything. They were just brutal to her.

EFFECTS OF DRINKING

► VAL

I'd always been pretty outgoing and I became this recluse, mainly because I didn't like people there when he was pissed out of his head, and it's so embarrassing. People laugh at him, they think it's so funny. They didn't have to see him pissing in the wardrobe because he didn't know where the toilet was. They didn't see him staggering. It was just horrific. I don't have to see that any more. It's an amazing difference in my life.

► MINNIE

It wasn't till he got on the drink that he started to abuse my mother. Without the drink he was the most loving man you could think of. I thought he was a lovely father. Then I started to see that the abuse was coming from the drink. This went on for the whole of their lives, till they died.

► LOLA

In the phone book I saw the word Al-Anon and on impulse dialled that number. A woman answered, and I found myself talking about my husband in a negative way. She listened and validated my experiences. I broke down and cried. I didn't know I had been harbouring such resentment. I felt so ashamed. I was glad the woman didn't know who I was. At work I told my colleagues that I had learned that my husband is an alcoholic and that this is our problem. He has a serious illness, a physical, emotional and spiritual disease, and all our problems are not my fault as he'd claimed all these years.

When he came home from work that day, my husband found a completely different wife. My first blunder was to tell him he is an alcoholic. He went into a violent rage. So what was new about this behaviour! I felt I was losing my mind. My life became unmanageable in two days. I rang my former boss. He listened with such compassion and I was swept away with the grief of loss in my life. He said

he was a recovering alcoholic himself.

One month later my husband had stopped drinking. I practised leaving him on several occasions, staying overnight at motels or with friends. This time was tense. Emotionally we were all over the place like a dog's dinner. Letting go is so scary.

I gradually learned to feel safe, and to think and speak for myself. I attended twelve-step groups, such as Co-Dependents Anonymous and was rewarded by having more personal power and serenity in my life. Spirituality has replaced religion. These days I'm better at taking care of myself. I have access to my feelings and inner knowing. I'm reclaiming the person I was meant to be. My whole self is open and becoming.

► JENNY

My brother was an alcoholic. If he'd been drinking pretty heavily the night before, this meant ongoing aggression. The actual physical violence from him was associated with the hangover. I hadn't realised that was the worst time.

VIOLENT PARENTS

► MINNIE

My father abused my mother as long as I can remember. This is physical abuse and sexual abuse. We lived in a town out west, a hot aggravated place with lots of miners. And he used to get on the drink. My mother used to come

up to my place and say, 'He's at it again,' and I'd say, 'Leave him.' 'Oh no, I can't leave him.' This was always how it was. She put up with it right to the day he died. As a child I took it till I was about nine, then I started to object.

He was drinking every day. He only once abused me that I could ever remember. After that he said sorry and never laid hands on me again. But for me to have to stand by and watch him beating my mother was awful. I used to scream at him, I used to hit him. Till one day, I was about sixteen, I picked up an aluminium jug and I hit him with it. I just couldn't take it any more. But mum wouldn't complain. She'd say to me, 'You mustn't talk about it outside of the house. It's our secret and it's only when he's on the drink.' Later though she started objecting too. A couple of times she cleared out and left him. He was in the merchant navy and this meant he was away a lot of the time. Then he'd come home and start drinking and abusing, then away he'd go again. One time he come home, and we just went and got a flat until he went back to sea again.

I can't stand violence of any kind. If there's a row going on I have to get away from it. When I married, my husband drank a little bit, and I said to him, 'If ever you raise your hand to me I'll leave this house right away. I'm not going to put up with it.'

▶ BELLA

I've never shared my experiences before and it is very difficult. I grew up in a very violent situation, with a

father who was very verbally abusive and at times physically abusive, and with a mother who was psychologically abusive. My mother still holds that control. I left my home town to escape her. I married an abusive man at nineteen and stayed with him for twelve years. I had a conversation with my mother as recently as yesterday and she said to me 'I don't know why you left your husband, you just didn't give it a fair go, you didn't put up with what I put up with!'

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN: LASTING EFFECTS

▶ VAL

All my life I've been a person who searched for love. My Dad died when I was 13, and Mum gave us away. She couldn't cope. I married at 16 and I was looking for safety, for love. I was so vulnerable.

▶ BETTY

I grew up in a family where there was no love. I felt I wasn't wanted and I wasn't. I got out of the frypan into the fire.

▶ CORA

I lived in a house with domestic violence as a child. My Mum provoked a lot of violence. She was very hard. I married for the first time at 15. I was pregnant and did everything I could to get out of the house.

► IRIS

I think violence destroys you, your family, peace, serenity and love. It has enveloped me and always lays in wait. The first time I was hit was when I was nine. My mother used a razor strop or thick leather belt. I hid behind myself in my mind, as, her eyes blazing, she slashed at my legs over and over again. If I cried she hit me more and if I tried to get away she hit more. I never told anyone, but my bruised legs had varicose veins by the time I was 13 years old, great bulging veins where she had hit me. I got on well with everyone except Mum. I thought I could get away from abuse. I managed to kick two husbands out, but Mum beat me again, just this month.

To survive I hate. Help costs money and I cannot afford to pay for counselling. I wish I could regain my easy-going cover-up, but I cannot. As an older woman I find it hard to make friends. I have no fun in me. I want to be the person I thought I was and not the person I now feel I am. But no, I am confused as I do not want to be that naive, gentle, thoughtful little doormat. I am not yet grown into whatever else I am becoming and it's painful to emerge from a cocoon.

► PEONY

When I hear of young children being treated violently, it makes me shudder. The effects last forever. The first time I remember was a belting with a razor strop. I was five years old. I was also sexually abused at other times. The effect on

me was that I always felt very lonely and different.

As I've got older, I find that my anxiety is always with me in the form of physical symptoms. It was years before I told anyone. To survive I withdrew from people. I'd told doctors and friends. Help could be there if people asked questions. To change the situation one has to become stronger and talk!

LEAVING THE VIOLENCE

► MARTHA

When my children were very small, he ended up in a psychiatric hospital. The social worker suggested I divorce him, but I didn't. I couldn't bear the idea of him ending up in somewhere like the Matthew Talbot hostel, or out on the street. I stayed with him for 39 years. It was a long time to put in, but I wasn't brave enough to leave. He was only ever physically violent once, but the verbal abuse was awful, the silences for days and days without a word being spoken. We moved down here and he only lived for another two years, once we got here. And then I was free. I don't know whether you ever saw Penelope Keith in *To the Manor Born*, the episode where she went to her husband's funeral? She came out of the church and she said to her friend, 'Is there anybody looking?' Then she threw her hat in the air, jumped with joy, and shouted, 'Hooray! Hooray!' That was exactly how I felt.

▶ CHERRY

I thought I could change my husband. Then I realised he was the one who needed to make a change. The worst part was he believed there was no problem. To survive I switched off and did my own thing I told my husband I was leaving, which meant selling the house. Then I realised I was the one who had to make and carry out that decision.

▶ QUEENY

In my experience remaining in the violent situation because of fear isn't the solution. Now I have left, my self-esteem is higher, and I have the courage to make changes. I just wish I'd had the strength to do something sooner.

▶ HONEY

I found many people could not understand why you stay in a violent marriage. The worst part was the total negative effects on myself and my two, now adult, children. To survive, I at first wanted to believe he would change. Then I took Valium, studied and worked as a trained nurse.

I changed the situation when I realised what damage was already done and that my 12 year old son wanted to kill him. I told a few people but found no help. The first counsellor I had was a man. He told me to be a total woman, with fluffy slippers etc. Then I read Germaine Greer's 'Female Eunuch'.

I am still aware that I have long standing fears and anger. I

wish I had been born now, not in 1940, or that I had the knowledge about women's inequality and that there had been the support systems that there are now against violence in all its forms.

I came from a non-drinking, loving family. They never knew of rape, violence, domestic violence, incest, shouting, swearing, put downs, financial blackmail, and injustice from solicitors and courts. I signed over home and everything to prevent either myself or my children being murdered.

▶ FIONA

I left the violence at home because I couldn't stand it any more. I was waiting for Social Security payments for six months. During that time, I slept in public toilets. I got enough to eat because a lot of shops used to have their bread right near the door, and I used to grab it and run off. Then I eventually shared a flat with a friend who provided me with money until I got Social Security sorted out.

I married my husband at 17, in the first couple of months of the relationship. We lived at his parent's place. He became violent while I was pregnant. I was probably six months gone, and it was a slap across the face. Next day he swore he'd never do it again.

I'd had my daughter and we moved into our own place. I went on the pension, and I paid all the rent, all the food. All of that time he never gave me any money. I guess I was disempowered.

He'd grab me by the hair and throw me down and kick me. He'd kick my teeth, my lip and gave me internal injuries. He did all sorts of violent things. At one point he grabbed me by my hair, dragged me down to the ground and tried to burn my eye with a cigarette. I used all the strength I had to push him back and crouched on the ground. I have scars all over my back where he burned me. He burned me through my jumper with a cigarette. I nearly killed him once. He was very drunk, and I was too. I grabbed him by the throat and blocked his wind-pipe, and he was on the floor. That was a year before I left him. It's just horrific to live like that. I couldn't leave because I really believed his threat, that he would hunt me down and kill me. It wasn't until I got to the point where it wasn't really worth going on like that. Then I got the strength to leave.

► PEONY

I was married at 32. My husband told me that he was 46. However, I found out about a week before we married he was 54. I was too embarrassed to do anything about it. The whole of my family was in England. I was out in Australia on my own. I knew he'd been married before and believed he had two children. After we were married I found out he had four. I expected him to make decisions and I just went along with them. I didn't realise I was being controlled. When I had my own two children, I didn't like the decisions he was making in regard to them. So I guess I became more assertive, which he didn't like. Things got

worse. He retired at 65, the youngest boy was just five. He had a heart attack which he began using to manipulate me. While he was working, I never saw a pay packet. I never knew how much he earned, except when he was on the pension, when he handed the money over to me. He was still getting a super payment and I never saw that. I'd have to beg for money to buy shoes for the boys. He started using the children, playing them off against each other. He'd put the oldest one down all the time. Several times I tried to get out. But with the children, I'd nowhere to go. I just didn't know what to do.

He was belittling me all the time. I didn't have any friends. It was difficult to invite people back to the house. He'd monopolise the conversation, and if I spoke he'd talk over me. All the social workers I saw asked, 'When are you going to leave?' By this stage I'd lost all confidence, and I couldn't make any decisions at all. I think they gave up on me.

This is how I came to leave. Last year, one of the boys was at home after a motorbike accident. My husband was having a go at me about something and my son told him to lay off. I told my son to go back to his room. My husband then followed him up the corridor saying 'Come on, be a bloody hero. You can hit an old man can't you?' My son snapped, but he didn't hit him. He grabbed my husband by the shoulders and pushed him against the wall. I went out to go to the bank.

When I got back the first thing my husband said to me was, 'I had to do it. I rang Aged Care and told them my

son had assaulted me and they sent an ambulance.' He told the ambulance guys that his son had assaulted him.

Then the police turned up. I was incoherent. I'd never had anything to do with police in my life. Then the police went up to the hospital, and found that my husband had decided to drop the charges.

I rang the hospital and said that I didn't want him back home. He had mild dementia and they were putting some of his aggression down to dementia. But he'd always been like that, it was his personality. Unfortunately, the psycho-geriatric nurse believed every word my husband said. As a result they sent him home. I felt I couldn't go out and leave him and my son together in the house.

The house was in his name. A community agency arranged for me to get a Housing Commission house. He had three hours per week in dementia care and while he was gone, I did the quickest flit you've ever seen. If I'd told him I was leaving, he'd either have just laughed or maybe had a heart attack. I only took half of our possessions. But we were out before 3 o'clock. He lived on his own for a couple of months. He's now in a nursing home and he's got another woman. I had stayed with him as I had nowhere to go. And also I thought the boys needed a father, although they had never had one anyway. But now I think the boys probably blame me for staying with my husband. I can talk about it one to one, but not in a group. It's too much like you're exposing yourself. I was married 29 years. My mother used to say, 'You've made your bed, you lie in it.' To this day I try not

to think about it, because of the guilt, because I knew he couldn't cope on his own. The guilt keeps coming back.

VIOLENCE THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

NANCY

Our children were brought up in this mess of drinking and decided to join in as the old saying goes, 'If you can't beat them, join them.' It didn't work. My eldest treated me with no respect and he also used the same filthy words on me that his father used. My son hasn't been near me since I left. I have no bed at my son's or daughter's, as their father is in and out and it would be very uncomfortable for them. They have kicked their badly done by father out twice each. He is in a boarding house.

CORA

He mentally abused me - he was very jealous and I wasn't allowed out unless he was there. He was a very domineering man. He died when I was 47 and now my kids have taken over where he left off. All the money I had, the kids have drained that out of me. My youngest boy was lovely, but when his dad died he took to drugs, took all my money and his marriage broke up. I've had a violence order against him. He was put in jail, because he broke the order eight times. I got him out of jail and now he's back home with me. I've asked him to go, and asked him to go. When he goes interstate driving, he gets back on the speed, he abuses me and takes my pension money.

► BONNIE

I was born in 1934 illegitimately. My mother was banished from the home. She was totally deaf. I was molested as a child three times. Then this man said, 'If you don't marry me within twelve months I won't marry you at all.' So there was the ultimatum. I took it, fell for it, and I married him. I had three children under five. My husband never helped me with the children, he would never bath them or have any communication with them, or change a nappy unless I handed them to him. My mother had always said, 'Always hand him his slippers,' and so on. So I accepted this as a way of life. I've never had a satisfactory sexual relationship with him - his technique was slam-bam-thank-you-ma'am. I've never had an orgasm with him. I've had them by myself. I discovered that when I was 40. I didn't know I had a clitoris till I was 40. Isn't that amazing?

He developed illnesses all through our married life. He had chest pains. We could never find out the reason for them, but it was usually when I was about to go into hospital to have a child. We were incompatible, but we always maintained a great love for each other. We neither of us liked each other very much because of my obvious strength and his many weaknesses.

I got to a point with his deep depression, and the tears that go with it, that it was wearing me down. So I thought, 'As I'm 65 this year, I have to take myself in hand and take care of the carer'. I just love helping people and caring for people.

That, I'm told, is the result of my childhood. I've been manipulated. I was advised by my husband's doctors, my doctor and counsellors to back off him and let him take responsibility for his illnesses himself, and to put myself first.

Finally, he told me he was leaving me after 45 years! I was devastated. I went directly into mourning and grieving for the loss of the 45 years. When all these problems with my husband came to a head a year ago, my daughter confessed to me that he had molested her. From what I can gather it was from about the age of eight. Had I known that, the marriage would have ended a long time ago. Also, I was absolutely amazed to discover that I'm only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to older women being left.

CARERS ABUSED AND ABUSING

► IDA

My husband probably should never have been married. He can't manage close relationships. I suppose this has put a lot of psychological pressure on me. I never felt it was his fault. He ended up having a dreadful midlife crisis, a nervous breakdown, from which he has never really recovered. So although it was violence, it was never physical. It was just lack of respect. I don't know what it was exactly behind it all. He didn't want to get very close to anybody and that makes it hard. It's been 12 years. I didn't realise till the last few years that you should be able to do something for yourself.

► SHEILA

We were at our wits end trying to help my husband's mother. She was in need of care. Her daughter and her grand-daughter, both of whom had an intellectual disability, were living with her. She was well into her eighties and these two women were abusing her. They were taking her phone, weren't getting proper meals for her and sometimes deliberately physically hurting her. Her daughter became intellectually disabled at the age of five. My mother-in-law had cared for her all her life, and she thought if she spoke up too much, her daughter might get into trouble. She owned the home, and the other two knew the home was left in perpetuity to them.

We tried to get help, but we were told quite definitely by the government department that she herself had to make the complaint. But we needed the capacity for a third party to make a complaint and be heard. We wouldn't have allowed a child to have to put up with the sort of harassment, but we were told a child is a dependent, your mother is an adult, and adults have to take responsibility for themselves. Sometimes, we just put her in the car and brought her home but, with everybody working, that didn't always work very well. Well, she died. She was 90 when she died. She was out at day care when it happened. The workers at the hospital and the day care centre all knew she was being abused. They were all trying to intervene. But no one could move.

THE SILENCE OF WOMEN PROTECTS THE PERPETRATOR

► LOLA

I had been emotionally bludgeoned into silence in my childhood. I had married a very violent alcoholic man, and was scared stiff of his rage attacks. My children and I had lived for decades in fear. I was obsessed with getting his love and approval by making his life easy. I see now that my silence only protected and empowered my abuser. Suddenly I found my anger. It terrified me.

► JENNY

My mother submitted to the element of blackmail in domestic violence. For example, when there was blood spattered all over the kitchen, as a result of his attacks, my mother was wiping it all up with a cloth, towel and mop, wiping all the blood up. She was saying, 'We've got to keep this within the family. We can't tell anyone.' That is particularly what shocked me, the fact that she had gone into this dysfunctional protection of him, seeing him as the victim. She even tried to get him and the kids away in the car, so he couldn't be charged with assaulting her. I've seen this in women's refuges, when women actually protect the perpetrator. My father drank and was violent. My brother is just the same. He drinks and is violent. My father died, thank God, or we'd all be walking around protecting him. My brother took over where my father left off.

CHANGING THE VIOLENT SITUATION

FANNY

I found a strong feminist counsellor. Later on everything came to a head and I ended the relationship. Men do not now play a large part in my life.

WINIFRED

In my experience, many women don't realise violence is happening to them. The first time, it came as a shock to me at the age of 16. The effect was devastating. I never got used to it. I fought back. Men think they own women. Women think they can change a man with love.

To survive, I went into a fantasy world. Changing the situation was hard. I told a friend, but no help was available then. Now I feel strong and help others, I wish there was serious help for women and children. The effects of violence on children are not taken seriously enough. They grow up with that festering inside - they are like wounded birds. As an older woman I expect respect, and I thought it was all over. But now I see the consequences on my adult children. The worst part is to see them continue the cycle.

JUNE

Changing the situation was frightening and I couldn't have done it without my parents' support. I told only one other person - in the strictest confidence. Help should be available to all women in a violent situation.

FANNY

Changing the situation is essential. Getting out of a violent relationship is the only way out. I told my friends this on many occasions. Help is always there if you seek it, but it's always a daunting task to get out of such a violent atmosphere. It's up to women to educate and talk to others about violence. I wish more women could acknowledge that no one has to put up with violence.

YVONNE

To change the situation I took part in the Older Women's Network violence workshop. I told the OWN Theatre Group Women. They saved me by always being there when times were bad. Now I talk about my past wherever it is required. I wish I had spoken out sooner.

SONYA

As an older woman I regret staying in this situation. I thought love would conquer all and persisted. But violence and alcohol negate love. The worst part is feeling ashamed and useless. To survive I found work and my independence. Changing the situation was the hardest thing to do. I told myself things were never going to change. Help came from the support of friends.

NANCY

I knew by this time I had to take over without him knowing, if we were to end up with a roof over our heads. I stopped drinking. I had to have as clear a head as possible. By this

time I was having panic attacks. There were highs and lows. We never went at cruise speed. I wanted to buy a house down the coast. With a great deal of support from one of our girls I got down here. I had one day to find a house. We moved in August 1993. I took the car off him. It was in my name by luck. There were so many traumatic experiences. I had stopped eating, so I dosed up on vitamins. I promised myself with God's help I was not going to hospital. I had the support of my youngest daughter and felt I just had to get down the coast and then seek help. I was a mess, 55 years old, with the menopause not controlled properly. I looked like a scraggy crazy woman.

He would go out, get drunk and try and bring his new very best friends home. I was rude and risked a belting, but they didn't get in. I had told our family and my husband that I wanted a decent life style, nothing less. Our daughter and I took out violence orders. He treated them as a joke. Nothing got better, except the support web I was getting around me.

I get so angry when I have to do certain things for myself, by myself, though I was told, 'You will be a stronger person for doing it.' All I knew was how hard it was to do it, but they were right. How else could I be writing this without shaking and shivering? I am getting better at talking properly and being quiet enough to listen to others. God has blessed me with people who share and care. I lived in fear and now I don't live in fear.

► HILDA

A few years ago I eventually divorced him. But I don't feel divorced. Nothing has changed, the house is still there, he's still living there. It might be a piece of paper, but it means nothing. I've left that life and I am making a new life. But I suppose I don't have enough support any more. I did have a lot of support, and I think I was very lucky. I have a partner, a companion - he's 75, a good deal older than me. We actually bought a small property beside some very close friends, and that enabled me to leave the city and a life in which I was not too happy at all. And it's quite good really compared to how it is in Sydney. I really hate going back to Sydney now. I mean this is my life now.

INDEPENDENCE AND EMPOWERMENT

► VAL

One day I was sitting in the lounge room and I thought, these are just material things, the lounge, the TV. Then I got out and I have not looked back. It's my life now. I have got maybe another twenty years left of my life and I'm not going to let that pass me by. The second time, there was no reason to stay, but I did, because I was older. I thought, 'It's going to be so much harder.' But I look back now and see how easy it was. How easy it was with just a pension. I live on the pension and I manage. If women in violent situations could just see that, and see there is a life to live out there... I have a new life. It's my life. That's exactly it,

it's my life... It's taken a while. It's only been the last few months that I've felt emotionally in control. I felt OK from the beginning, but not as much as now. I now feel I'm totally in control of my life. While you're there your emotional doors are locked. And even though you could just walk right out that door, something stops you. The peace of mind is so incredible and it costs nothing. Money can't buy it. It's fantastic.

► **NELLY**

Well he never asked me for sex. He just took it. He raped me, in other words. I haven't fallen in love with any man since then, and I don't want to. I do not want to. I have better friendships with females who think along the same lines as me, who are gentle, who are caring. It's changed my whole attitude. I don't call it scars. I call it the 'betterment of my life'. I feel I've been empowered. I've become a real woman. A real woman - someone who is independent, who can stand up and say, 'I don't like this,' who can speak up and still do what I want with my life. I don't have to kowtow to anybody.

► **VAL**

Support networks are what's needed. Give a woman a chance to speak, and when they hear even one woman's story, it gives them the courage also to speak out. Then you know you are not alone, there are lots of others out there.....

TELEPHONE NUMBERS AGAINST VIOLENCE

NEW SOUTH WALES

- ▶ **Domestic Violence 24 Hour Service**
1800 65 64 63 02 9637 3741
1800 626 267 TTY
- ▶ **Police**
000
- ▶ **Women's Information and Referral Service**
1800 817 227
- ▶ **Women's Legal Resource Centre**
1800 801 501 02 9637 4597
- ▶ **NSW Rape Crisis Centre**
1800 424 017 02 9819 6565
- ▶ **Police Domestic Violence Liaison Coordinator**
02 9977 9499
- ▶ **Lifeline**
131 114
- ▶ **Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre**
1800 686 587
- ▶ **Interpreter Service**
131 450
- ▶ **Immigrant Women's Speakout**
02 9635 8022