

Survivor 2 Story Transcript

Interviewer: With your permission, please share your story.

Survivor 2: Yes, I experienced domestic violence. It started in my relationship back in 2011. I met him and fell in love with him right away. I was happy. I met him online, on Halloween night. We met in person in November 2nd. Everything was going well, five days later I met him again. By November 7th, we were in a relationship. Three days later I came out as gay to my parents. They both were upset of course. I moved out of the house and in with him. As time went along, things were really good for the first year. Second year I started to notice more verbal abuse was getting bad. He started getting angry easily, miscommunications, he was hearing but I didn't have a problem with that.

Interviewer: Did he sign?

Survivor 2: He signs now, really well. Before he didn't, then slowly picked it up. I started to notice he liked control. His perspectives were different than mine. He would think that I was not paying attention. When I sign, I expect him to look at me and not look away. Deaf people like to have eye contact, sometimes when he looks at me, he will look away and rely on my voice. I'm Deaf. He can understand my voice, but I would rather eye contact. So, I know that he is paying attention. Then we moved in with his best friend, and that didn't work out, then we moved to grandma's house before settling in our apartment. Between grandma's house and our place, he started to be more physical. Started with hitting. That day, we were working at Walmart, that night, he ended up being more physical and got himself arrested. Technically I was supposed to be arrested, not him. Why? I put my hand on him. I was trying to get his attention.

The police said it wasn't me because I was Deaf. The officer said that he should not have hit me because I was trying to get his attention and he scratched me. So, my boyfriend was the one that hit me, not the other way around. I should not have tried to get his attention. The officer knew that was a Deaf culture thing to do. That made me feel a little oppressed by the police. He actually had me wait in the back of the

car. I was upset, in a panic attack. I couldn't breathe, it was too hot in that car. I saw my boyfriend outside talking to the police, and then the officer told me to turn around. The camera in the car only caught the side of me, not the whole view. The officer signed a little and I signed back to him. We tried to communicate that way. The officer asked if I wanted to press charges, and I said no. The officer said ok and wrote down yes. I never said yes, I said no because I knew it was my fault. That led to placing my boyfriend in jail for the night. The next day we were in the court room and that made things more physical and verbal there. I tried to tell the court that it was not his fault and they released him with a fine. The court ordered a 72 hour no contact hold, then it became 1 month, two months, three months. We ended up sneaking over each other's places until I got 3 bruises on one side, two on the other, and 7 lip splits. He came over to my place and tried to use a 9- or 10-inch knife and tried to stab me in the face. So, at that time I fought him, and got myself cut. He moved a bit and that's when I pushed him away from me.

When he saw how terrified I was, he threw the knife away on the floor. He became upset and tried to kill himself. I ended up trying to help him That was a bad experience. After I fought for it, we lasted 3 years without any improvement, then he decided to break up for a year and half. I saw him again after that and he improved a little bit. He told he is afraid to touch me again, and I told him that I was afraid of being hurt again. We have been back together for two and half years and so far, no red flags. He is improving little by little. Compared to the past when it was bad and he was young at the time, to him older and him knowing the difference between the two. He realized what he did. I did have an ex before him who physically abused me as well. He acted as if I was the one physically abusing him. In reality I wasn't. He was lying, went behind my back, takes my car leaving me without a way to get anywhere.

Interviewer: When did you realize that you needed to get help? When did you realize you had to do something?

Survivor 2: My friend who is hearing. At that time, I didn't know about Deaf Unity and that they had advocates. That night when we both fought, I did try to kill myself. I decided to call my friend and have her come over. She saw my bruises

and got upset. She wanted to talk to my boyfriend. I told her no, don't worry, I am fine. I asked her to take me somewhere. I asked to take me to another city to visit another friend. She asked why and I told her I wanted to get a tattoo. She asked me why. That night, my boyfriend told me that I was nothing but just a ghost dog to him. Meaning I meant nothing to him. Just like a dog to him. That really hurt. He had an affair that night too.

My friend said okay, and took me to Beloit, Wisconsin to see my friend. We talked about the tattoo and my friend said okay. I paid \$20 for it. I got a tattoo on my right neck of a ghost dog. My favorite movie is *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. The dog in the movie is a ghost. I went back to my boyfriend a week later and he noticed I had my hood up. He asked why my hood was up, and I said no reason. He started to get suspicious and then mad. So, I agreed to take down my hood and show him the tattoo. He became so guilty, so to this day, it reminds him of what he did and the guilt. He told me he didn't want to do that again. I noticed he was guiltier after I got that tattoo. When people ask me why I got that tattoo, I say it's because I like that character in the movie, while it had a real reason behind it.

He called me a ghost dog, so I got that. That's the reason I got that tattoo. That night, I was thankful for my best friend for coming and supporting me. I learned about Deaf Unity and their resources two to three years later. I wish I knew about them at the time of the abuse, but they had just started up. Wish I had them that time, I would have resources and support from them. Maybe things would have been better. But at this moment, everything is going well. I want to start helping people improve their lives by sharing my experience.

Interviewer: Can you share any barriers or frustrations that you experienced?

Survivor 2: The police. Remember I talked about the police officer that night, the one that signed a little bit? There was no interpreter at that time. I asked for one, and they didn't understand me. I told them I didn't want to press charges, and they wrote down yes. When I got to the court room, there wasn't any interpreters there too. The appearance was the next day. I went there and sat with a hearing friend that can sign, and asked what they all said. She had a hard time because we were

all the way in the back and couldn't hear. My ex at that time was up front with the judge, chained up from hands to waist and below. Made me feel like they viewed him as an extremely violent person, like he would have caused a fight in the court room when he wouldn't. He was also chained to his feet. My heart sank when I saw that. I never imagined him like that person. It was his first arrest. They could have given him a chance, but they determined it as serious. I tried to fight for him, but people said they couldn't get me involved because no interpreter was available. I tried to offer using a phone or a virtual way to communicate but they said no, in person only. They offered to write back and forth, and I said no and wanted an interpreter. They said no and wanted to write. This happened in Illinois.

They were difficult. I hated them. I tried to fight to talk for a while, until my ex finally got himself a lawyer. The lawyer called me and let me talk. He was able to get the case dropped because the camera evidence was not clear with me being sideways, and there was no evidence of me saying yes or no when asking to press charges. There was nothing they could do about that; the police couldn't write that down without evidence. So, they had to remove that. That was new to me. So they took that off the record due to lack of evidence. That was the one thing I was happy about, with that being dropped. I still regretted getting the police involved in the first place, but at the same time I don't because it taught him a lesson when the police got involved. He changed for the better, it was hard work to improve at the beginning.

Interviewer: What did you notice helped you get through the journey and not give up?

Survivor 2: I grew up in an abusive household. I saw how it changed everyone. I was also bullied in school my entire life. I tried to change and ignore that in 8th grade before getting in high school. They had me labeled due to my upbringing. I tried to prove that that kind of experiences would not define my behavior. So, I learned the effects of that and when I got into college and got into my relationship. I knew that what I was experiencing was preferable to the one I grew up with and they didn't stop. When he started, he did stop eventually. When he started to improve, I knew the red flags would start going down. What I grew up with, the red

flags were constantly up. I didn't want that to happen again. I told him I know you can improve. I know you will. I kept fighting for that. Now, for two years, he has not touched me like that. I told him one more time, I would leave. I wasn't going to put up with that anymore. My parents also told him that if he did anything, they would do something about that or put him in jail. I told them not to worry, I can handle myself. I am 30 now. That whole thing was 9 years of my life with him and the other year with another ex. I also preferred the current situation than the other ex. With the other ex, I actually went to West Virginia with him and we fought at the hotel. The manager threatened to kick us out due to being loud. Luckily, I explained to the manager that as Deaf people our voices tend to rise during fights. I told the ex that we had to stop in order to stay. I learned how to tell my boyfriend to stop and I didn't want the police involved. I know you can improve. Help him realize that he shouldn't do that and try to not put hands on me or misunderstand.

All I was asking for was better communication. I noticed we had bad communication before because he didn't really understand Deaf culture. He didn't know my reactions was animated, and assumed that I was giving attitude. I had to tell him that it didn't mean that, or if I raise my voice. I don't know when I am raising my voice, which causes him to think I was yelling. I wasn't! I had to tell him again and again. It was hard to get through to him, sometimes his head is like solid iron and I can't get through and had to find a way to get through.

That was hard. That was when I was finally able to get through a little bit, but not fully. He started to get it. I had to going until it got through. He is starting to improve with understanding Deaf culture. He knows now why Deaf people pound on the tables and that our facial expressions are animated. He still doesn't understand my voice that well. I have to remind him that I am not yelling. If he thinks I'm mad, he has to ask me if I am. That will let me realize it and say no. I don't know my own voice, I do wear hearing aids, but I don't know my own voice. I can hear others, but not realize when mine is mine. Sometimes I am signing away and not realizing my voice was coming out and increasing. Reminding him that it might not be him, but be me. That is something we are still working on.

Interviewer: In your journey, what kind of support did you have? It can be a friend, a family, counselor, an agency, and what didn't work?

Survivor 2: I have a best friend who is hearing that helped me. They would try to make sure they take me out, made sure I stayed over if I didn't want to go back home, wanted to make sure I was safe. If I didn't take up on that opportunity and went back, what would have happened to me? I'm glad they made me stay, sometimes I would actually walk out the door and they would pull me back and tell me to stay. I felt a little alarmed with that behavior, but I knew that meant they wanted me safe. It wasn't to hurt me, it was to help me understand. Sometimes I am pretty stubborn, I'll admit it, I am stubborn sometimes. Now I think back and I do thank her for that. Sometimes she will let me borrow her car so my ex couldn't find me. I would borrow her car and do errands, and my ex would think I was at the house the whole time. One of my ex did stalk me. He made sure he knew where I was and where I went. One time I left my phone out and he turned my GPS on and I didn't know. He could see where I went. That was my experience. Now that doesn't happen anymore. My parents did not help me. My parents were always suspicious, asking if I was abused. I would say no because I didn't want them involved. I separated myself with them on that. My parents view on things vs deaf view on things were very different. The way I say things sometimes, they take it seriously and jump to conclusions, while I wasn't done talking. They would say let's go to your place now, and I would have to tell them to stay. They try to include themselves. They don't understand that and I have to explain that again and again. Sometimes I give up and let it happen. Sometimes they will tell other family members and spread it around. My boyfriend would get inbox messages from the family members, and that made it worse and didn't help. I told my family that's one of the reasons why I don't share much with them. The family doesn't understand. My family is starting to understand my view on things, and sending messages will make things worse. If you hear about it, do nothing. Find a way to help me instead of going after him. Only talk to me until I am by myself. Sometimes they don't think about that.

Interviewer: You say inbox, do you mean email?

Survivor 2: That and Facebook messenger.

Interviewer: What do you mean Facebook?

Survivor 2: My parents have his email, because I did give it to them to talk to each other. Now they found him on Facebook and started to message him there. So other family members that have Facebook too, my parents would give his name to them.

Interviewer: Interesting

Survivor 2: Some of them I have to tell my boyfriend to block because they went across a line and I have to tell them to back off. Some know enough just to check in and leave it at that. I like the ones that do, not the rest.

Interviewer: Did you see any agency or an advocate?

Survivor 2: Not at that time. There was none at the time.

Interviewer: None? Advocate?

Survivor 2: There were none at that time. I would say I went to one of Deaf Unity's workshop in around 2013 or 2014, not sure. I went to a workshop and learned about their advocacy. At the time I didn't have one, I was too shy and embarrassed. Some of them I knew them on a personal level and I didn't want to disclose to them. And one of my classmates used to work there. She knew what I went through, but not all of it. It was hard for me to share my story at that time. Now I can share my story. I couldn't back then because I was afraid of what they would look at me differently. You know how a lot of people judge quickly, you have to understand how we feel. It's not all about the judgment.

Interviewer: That is true! Thank you for sharing that!

Interviewer: You know everyone talks and needs self-care, take time to love themselves. What did you do that was fun, or you enjoyed and let go of things?

Survivor 2: I was more of going outdoors, I like camping. I miss camping, I haven't gone camping in over 10 years. I still want to go, I miss camping. A friend and I are planning on going this summer I can't wait, I hope we make it this year in August. I like to go out with friends and go swimming, go to the mall, or out to eat with friends. That helps me unplug. I also like to watch my favorite ASL song videos, watch the romantic songs. Helps me disconnect and feel good. That's one of my favorites.

Interviewer: Was there anything that didn't work for you? Like a massage, art, coloring.

Survivor 2: I don't like massages. It's not comfortable. Sometimes, when I was going through the abuse, massage would hit that spot where I am hurting, and I wouldn't like that. Massages didn't really work for me, maybe for others, but not me. Where he hit me in the front, sometimes the massage therapist would massage a spot in the back that triggers the pain in the front. Sometimes I didn't feel comfortable. I'd rather not be touched. If I didn't go through the abuse, maybe I would have been okay with the massage. After the abuse, I did not want to be touched. Even if the family wants to hug me, I say no. They would ask me why. If they were to hug me, they may be where I am hurting. If I move and I will hit that area. So, I would rather not be touched. If it healed, I would let them touch. I can't draw, maybe sometimes. I like to color better, when the picture is already there. I don't do it otherwise. Sometimes I would do crafts. I would build things with wood sometimes, or building things with metal. Right now I am more into Legos. You know Pokémon? I'm collecting that now. It helps me to disconnect because I really love Pokémon. As I collect that, I think of my nephew. He lives in Missouri and I miss my nephew. That's why I like Legos now. Now I have about over 60 different Legos all over my home. Most of it is Pikachu.

Interviewer: Is that the yellow one with the pointy ears?

Survivor 2: Yes, that's the one I have most of on the top. I collect those. That's one of the things that comforts me, helps me focus. Sometimes when I finish building one, my

partner would say wow that's fast! Legos help me focus. Other people take their time, but I just focus and everything in my head goes away. I get so focused then I get up and feel better. That's one of my favorite things to do.

Interviewer: Ok, last question. If a victim were to come up to you, what advice would you offer to the victim?

Survivor 2: It depends on their situation. Some situations could be not that serious. I want to make sure the tips they get are appropriate and is not wrong based on assumption. Domestic violence could mean psychological abuse, emotional abuse, or physical. We don't know what it is without knowing. If they talk about what happened, then I know what to tell them. If they won't tell me, then I will just tell them about Deaf Unity or advocacy services. It's the best without knowing the situation. If victim tells me a little more, then I know what to offer them and give them more. If they don't give me a little, then how do I know what to offer them? I want to give them what they give me. It'll be nice because I was a victim, I would be happy to help them. They don't have to tell me everything, just enough like physical abuse.

Then I can give them the right resources. Instead of giving them everything that they don't need and overwhelm them with all that information. It would be nice if I can give them exactly what they need.

Interviewer: In today's society in America, unfortunately, view that men do not experience domestic violence. Do you agree or disagree?

Survivor 2: Disagree! For example, I grew up with a dad saying don't cry. If you cry, you're not a man. I hated that quote. I cry in movies, I cry at proposals, that's me, I think it's cute! I cry when others are crying and hurt. I show support, it's hard. Sometimes I can support with crying, sometimes I can't. It's ok for men to cry. Crying shows your true emotions. I hate seeing them bottle it up and say it's okay. It's okay to let it out, if you let it out, it will make you stronger.

The more you hold back, the less strong you become. I'm not trying to be mean, but if you think holding it in makes you strong, it doesn't. It drags you down more to the

point that you become depressed, or suicidal. I fear for that the most. Sometimes I try to get them to talk, saying it's okay to talk. I'll be happy to listen. Maybe we have the same experience. If I can relate, we can talk more about it. If I can't, I can connect them to someone who can. It will be nice to have that support, then to notice them holding back and doing nothing about it. It's okay for a man to cry, it's okay.

Interviewer: Whew, it's a serious topic. Let them know it's alright. Men have a stigma to appear tough and fine.

Survivor 2: It's not just being scared of being abused by women, it could be from a family member, friends, by the LGBTQ community, or by politics. Any kind of abuse, it's okay to talk about.

Don't hold back, talk about it. Speak up for what you believe in. If you speak up about what you believe in, you will feel better. I used to be scared of telling people I am gay, I grew up acting like I was straight. I told classmates I was bi, people view that differently. Then I graduated, met my boyfriend, I finally came out. My parents were mad, but started researching and realized that we are just humans. Same as people of color, they are just human beings, no different. Just don't hold it in. Say something. If you don't like it or disagree, that's their problem, not yours. I should stay strong for myself. Be proud of yourself and who you are.

Interviewer: True! What you say is important, so others can see you and say I feel better and I am not alone.

Survivor 2: Like I said, they are not the only one. You don't know if your friends have the same experience as you if you don't talk about it. If you talk about it, maybe one of your friends will come to you and say something. If you don't say something, how will they know what you're going through? I've noticed some people hold it in really well, at the same time not realizing how many friends went through the same thing. It may feel or look bad, but they may have gone through that and understand. It would be nice to have someone support you.

Interviewer: Definitely true! Thank you for sharing your story and your experience! I appreciate it.