



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HANSARD

Wednesday 23 November 2016

Lindsay Electorate: White Ribbon Day

Ms HUSAR (Lindsay) (13:57): Community leaders especially speak as advocates about domestic violence, but they rarely speak as victims. I would like to do something a little different today. In my first speech in this place, I said 29 out of my 36 years of life had been affected by domestic violence. I am a survivor of family violence, and it has taken me a long time to overcome the trauma of that and be where I am today. I know there are a lot of women out there, many of whom suffer in silence, and today I stand in solidarity with survivors and with those women who are afraid to speak. I will use my story, told in this place, to advocate for the change we need. I will use the prelude to White Ribbon Day, which is on this Friday, as an opportunity to shine a light into the darkest corner of my own life.

The first 13 years of my life were marred by physical domestic violence committed towards my mother at the hands of my always-drunk-when-abusive father. My dad was the son of a World War II German soldier who committed many acts of violence against his own wife and against his seven children. My father had been raised in a home where violence was the accepted norm at a time when society said these things were private matters. Whilst the blows that landed on my mother during my childhood did not land on me physically, they might as well have. The trauma inflicted was the same. I recall it vividly—and in great detail. Each episode of this violence over my first 13 years was different, but the aftermath was always the same: dad would apologise and promise to be different, and that would work for just a short time.

On the evening of another round of abuse, Dad launched the family dinner of that night at the wall. The stain remained on that wall for a very long time, but the stain in my heart would linger much longer. Mum then bundled my sister and me into the family car and we fled. We would go to the refuges in our community until, after so many years and so many incidents, my father knew the locations and we were not safe there anymore. We then shifted to staying in hotels, which were located above pubs, where the people below were loud, and sometimes their noise would spill into the streets, waking me and reminding me that I was not in my own bed or in my own home. I was in a foreign place because I was not safe in my home.

One night, when Mum was hurrying to get my sister and me out, dad had removed and smashed the distributor cap from the car, rendering it useless and leaving us trapped. The police fetched us that time. I still remember sitting in the Penrith police station well into the early hours of the morning and the police officers giving us pink milk while we waited. The police did their best. Again, after this event, my mum returned home.

We know many, many women return time and time again, even when their lives are massively disrupted, along with those of their children, and I hope that the blame that was launched at my Mum during the nineties for not leaving is no longer part of the 'solution' around domestic violence and that the question of 'why doesn't she just leave' quits being asked. Eventually, though, the courage rises up, services step up and women stand up, finally leaving—but not before one last terrible incident. There were 13 police cars the last time physical violence affected my childhood. But this was the end of the physical violence once and for all. Whilst the physical part ceased, other abuse around finance and control ramped right up. Sadly, the wheel of domestic violence continues to affect my life as a grown woman with children of my own. The last 16 years of my life have been and continue to be affected by domestic and family violence.

In the limited time I have left, I would like to take this opportunity to thank opposition leader Bill Shorten for his continued support of my personal situation, his understanding and the support he provides to me. I would like to thank my caucus colleagues and our staff who know my story yet do not judge me and continue to provide support. I would like to acknowledge the Penrith Women's Health Centre, who have been providing services to my community for 30 years, including to my mum then and to my own family now.

In my experience I have found that victims mostly do not talk about domestic violence because other people do not talk about domestic violence. For many years I was embarrassed and I was ashamed. I know that I should not have been but I was. I hope that today I have lent my voice, my story and my passion for advocating for change to the choir of the white ribbon movement to stand up, to speak out and to act. Thank you.



Emma Husar MP
Federal Member for Lindsay

