



Survivor Deanne urges anyone experiencing domestic violence to "be brave" and report the offence.

AUSSIE HOSTAGE SURVIVOR TELLS 'I can FINALLY smile again!'

Courageous Deanne Bridgland shares her painful story to help other Australian women break free from domestic violence *reports JONICA BRAY*

Her hands shaking, Deanne Bridgland picked up her phone and held it to her ear. "You can either choose to make this phone call good or not," barked the voice at the other end. Deanne knew she had to comply. It was Nick Pasinis calling from jail. Deanne had been in a violent relationship with him for more than a year and, when he was arrested, she hoped she was finally free. "The police took me for a welfare check and I provided a statement against him," says Deanne, now 46. "But that day, I got a message from Nick, and then a phone call asking where I'd been. It was like he was watching me."

Ever-present threat Although Pasinis had been remanded for a serious assault charge in 2007, and a protection order was made against him, he was still calling Deanne up to 12 times a day and having her followed. "I didn't feel safe," she says. "I didn't know if the police could keep me safe. I lost all trust in everyone. He called again and sent someone around to take me back to the police station to change my statement to 'no complaint'. I had to do it. I was terrified of him."

When Deanne first met Pasinis at a Melbourne pub in 2006, she was on a break from work to further her studies - moving into criminology following a double degree in psychology and sociology. She came from a good family in WA, didn't drink alcohol, and valued her career. Deanne found the professional fishing angler charming and intelligent. They began dating. "He had a presence and he made you feel like you were the only person in the room," she explains. Within a year, her life was turned upside-down. Barely surviving each day, Deanne was gagged and held prisoner in Pasinis's garage, beaten senseless and tormented with details of how he was going to harm her next time. "Not a day went by without bruises," says Deanne. "He'd tell me what to eat and when. I was down to 38kg, being starved some days and force-fed others." Hospital staff often called police when Deanne was admitted with injuries, including broken arms. "I fell down drunk," she'd say. With Deanne too scared to press the assault charges, Pasinis only served five months for drugs found in his possession when police arrested him, and was

out of jail in late 2007. Within weeks, he and Deanne were back to where they started. "When you're isolated like that, it's more like a hostage situation," she explains. "It sounds crazy but I relied on him. "I wasn't allowed to watch TV or even read Target brochures. I'd lost contact with my friends because I didn't want to get them involved. My family was all in another state and I didn't want him knowing where."

First steps to freedom Finally, one year after Pasinis was released at the end of 2007, Deanne's sister came to stay and she felt able to leave her tormentor for good. "Having someone there helped," she says. "It wasn't easy, and he kept trying, but eventually he gave up." Deanne attempted to rejoin society but, painfully thin and with barely any teeth due to Pasinis's brutal attacks, "people thought I was a meth addict", she says. "No one wanted to talk to me... I couldn't get a job." Sinking in and out of depression, Deanne knew something had to give. In early 2010, she gathered the courage to officially report Pasinis for his reign of terror. "He ruined my life and I couldn't let him get away with it," she says. "I still didn't feel safe knowing he was out there and I worried he'd do it to someone else." Pasinis pleaded guilty to two counts of intentionally causing serious injury and



Deanne's injuries were an obstacle to her moving on.

Dr Madeline helped her get her life back.

A helping hand

When the Smile Solutions team in Melbourne heard about Deanne's story, they insisted on helping to rebuild her smile and confidence. "Each year we donate \$100,000 of dental services to the homeless through the Salvation Army," says dentist Dr Madeline Sinclair. "When the opportunity to assist this very worthy cause was presented to us, we accepted with open arms."

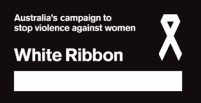
After two months of weekly appointments, Deanne finally had something to smile about. She says the work Madeline and the Smile Solutions team have done has changed her life forever. "It means everything to me. I don't have to be embarrassed, I can eat a steak, and there is no pain. I can't even explain how good it feels... it's amazing!" smilesolutions.com.au

was sentenced to eight years. Psychologists said it was the worst case of domestic violence they'd seen and even considered seeking advice from torture experts. Then, in a shocking twist, Deanne was charged with conspiracy and attempting to pervert the course of justice for dropping her complaint after Pasinis called her from jail in 2007. She was found guilty and given a two-year suspended sentence. "They did that so they could put him away for a longer time, but now I have a criminal record, too," Deanne says. Despite this trade-off, she stands by her course of action. "I urge anyone in this sort of situation to be brave because the abuser will never change."

If you or someone you know is affected by domestic violence, call the 24/7 helpline today: 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Let's get behind White Ribbon

You can support the International Day of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (aka White Ribbon Day) on Tuesday, November 25. White Ribbon is Australia's male-led campaign to end men's violence against women. On average, one woman is killed every week as a result of intimate partner violence. The campaign raises awareness and runs programs with youth, schools, workplaces and local communities. whiteribbon.org.au



Deanne (second from right) leaves a Victorian court in 2010 charged with conspiracy.



Psychologists were shocked by Pasinis's torment.

Pictures: Nick Cubbin/bauersyncination.com.au, 730 Report ABC.