

## MAYA'S STORY

# Please, not send him back

*We had an arranged marriage and in the beginning, we just two new people getting to know each other, just getting to love each other. It was good, at that time. I was 19, he was 31. We lived in Kathmandu, Nepal.*

He was a trekking guide. His father too. They take all the tourists, all the overseas people, up in the Himalayas. One time, he made friends with an Australian couple and they invite him to go stay with them in Sydney. They helped him and he got the working visa. We came here in 2009. Our baby daughter was five months old.

I didn't know what it would be. I never even heard of Australia before then. I never been anywhere, far. I didn't even know my own country. I left school really young, maybe 13? So Australia was a big plus: lucky for him and lucky for me.

It was really exciting but new and very hard. I didn't understand any English. I had a little baby and then two more would come soon. A ton of things started to go downhill.

He was working as a house painter and always going to the pub at the end of the day with his work friends. When we were in Nepal, he was living with his parents and never drinking but here, once he started drinking he couldn't stop. There was no-one to watch over him, to control him.

We went to live in a new area and things started getting very bad. It was very far away from everything.

'My job is hard, that is why I drink so much,' he say to me. 'You don't understand, you never work.'

And maybe he was right. I didn't know about earning the money, things like that. I never been in his workplace and I never have a job myself. But also, he doesn't understand how hard it is for me alone with the kids in the house. I can't drive car yet, there is not a lot of buses coming. I'm home alone with three babies: 24/7, six or seven days a week. And still not much English, no TAFE.

First he drank only when he come back from work. Then he started to wake up in the middle of the night for more drink, and then start again in the morning. Sometimes he wouldn't go to work because of the drinking and the money goes – sometimes not even enough money to buy milk or food.

There is fighting. I am angry, he is angry – he swears and things like that but never physical with me. He never did that and I think he never would. I say to myself, 'Okay, doesn't matter what happens, he never gonna lay hand on me.' I had that belief, right? His father never hit in his life so I thought that my husband, he like that too.

It was 7 years like this: all the time drinking, angry, all the same but I just kept going. I didn't know what I can do to get help then. I haven't seen the world outside my house. I didn't know where I could go.

One night everything changed. It was the Sherpa Festival.

The Sherpa Festival time is very special for me. In my country it's like our Christmas – we clean the whole house, see our friends and go out with our families. Every year now here, we go to a special party with lots of other Sherpa and Nepalese people. It's not the same as my country, but it still feels exciting.

That morning, I got my husband ready and fine for the party. I cut his hair and put a little bit of dye in it. I'd told him since night before not to drink that day because it's a lot of Sherpa community people there. And they're gonna talk and it's gonna be embarrassing.

I said to him, 'Just make sure you control yourself. Once you come home you drink, but at the party, please no.' He say 'Alright, alright, I'm not gonna drink.' But after I got him ready he went out and when he come back later, oh my god he is totally knocked out. I got so stressed just looking at him and my excitement, my happiness had already gone down.

The kids were running around screaming and crying and he was over-drunk. He suddenly came behind me and punched me.

I was so shocked because remember, in my mind I had that belief that he would never do this to me. And so when he did, I couldn't say anything. I couldn't do anything. He hit me so many times and I was just looking at his face and seeing the way he is looking at me. The kids are crying louder and running up to us 'Don't hit Mama'. This was the first time in my life, I called the police.

At that time we still have landline and I just press triple zero. I didn't know that when you call police, they record everything but they do. The police were listening to everything happening. They heard the kids crying and my husband hitting. I was trying to control him. I said, 'You stop, you stop okay? And then I'm not gonna tell police.' And I hung up. But he didn't stop and from then, the phone kept ringing and ringing. The police kept trying to call me back but I couldn't answer in front of him...

And then somehow the police were at the door. They saw everything, tackle him and took him outside.

I tell them not to send him back here. 'Please, not to send back.' And the police take him away.

But late that night, he came back again. I went to neighbours for help and called police. They came and got him and I locked all the doors. The next day, my husband came back again.

He said he had nowhere to go and I said, 'I'm gonna get trouble if you stay, just go.' But no, he stayed outside. He had this little kids' tent thing and was just sleeping under it and waiting. The kids and I were inside all the time and I kept on ringing the police. One time, I spoke to the woman police officer and I said,

'He's always coming back here. You said he's not allowed, but he's got nowhere to go. He's gonna come back. What am I going to do?'

I was crying and she probably doesn't want to hear me cry so she told me to call a number for a women's refuge. It was Bonnie's. She said, 'You can go and stay there.'

*Then I get the call I've had so many times, since the first time:  
'Can I come to your place?'*

I can still remember calling Bonnie's that first time and asking them, 'Can I bring all my house stuff? Like my cups, my fridge, my bed, everything?' They kindly said, 'No but we have everything here. Just bring your clothes.'

So I packed up everything in my house and chucked it in storage.

That was 5 years ago. Everybody was so good to us. Before I come, I know nobody to ask if I don't understand something but then I can ask my caseworker. 'Is this true? Can I do this?'

It opens up my eyes about which way to go. And I think, 'Okay, I'm gonna do this next step. I'm going to go this way.'



I meet so many women here and when they tell me their stories, I think, 'Oh my god. That is bad.' I know I have had bad things happen but I think I'm a little bit lucky too.

After I made that call to the refuge, so much changed in my life. Sometimes I think, if I wasn't talking to the police officer that time and she didn't give me this number, I think I'm still gonna be there. I didn't know anybody and I couldn't go anywhere before but after talking to that police officer, I came to Bonnie's and I think from there, my life is start to move, move forward.

I first stayed at Bonnie's in the refuge and then we move to another Bonnie's place, a transitional place where we can be on our own, and then I get help to find a private rental.

In the beginning, I'm just getting used to things, you know? I take the kids to school, do shopping and start an English class at Liverpool so my speaking and understanding English gets better. I have no Certificates, nothing and I don't know what I can do but I just keep pushing on. I always want to learn more.

Every Tuesday I go to Bonnie's Creative Club with the other ladies. I love it so much and never miss it. One day I'm having conversation with another lady and I tell her, 'Lots of girls from my country work in aged care. I think I wanna work there too.' She said, 'You should do the Certificate course then.' I told her, 'No good for me – my reading and writing is zero.'

And you know what she said? She said, 'I'll come with you. Let's see how we go?' So we enrolled together but then, before classes even start, there's trouble for me. On orientation day, people already take notes. I told my friend, 'I can't do this. It's too hard.' But she pushed me to stay. She said, 'Don't worry. We're gonna do it.'

So that day, I didn't try to write anything. I just listen, listen. And the pressure is gone, you know?

Then when the classes got started, I met other friends. My teacher is so good too: so full of life. She told me I could take assessments home and finish in my own time and that's what I did. I take the work home and try Google translate. My sister in America she helped me too. I take pictures and send them to her and she explain me all the questions and what it says. Then I go back to Google translate and put it in my own words. My friends from the class share their work with me to help and I get my Certificate 3! Then the teacher say, 'Now do Certificate 4 – just six months more.'

Sometimes I think when you're in a bad situation with man, you think 'I can't do anything.' And me, I don't have any education and I think I'll always be in that way, you know? But then a friend came and pushed me to do it. And then more friends to keep me going. It's amazing. You can change your life.

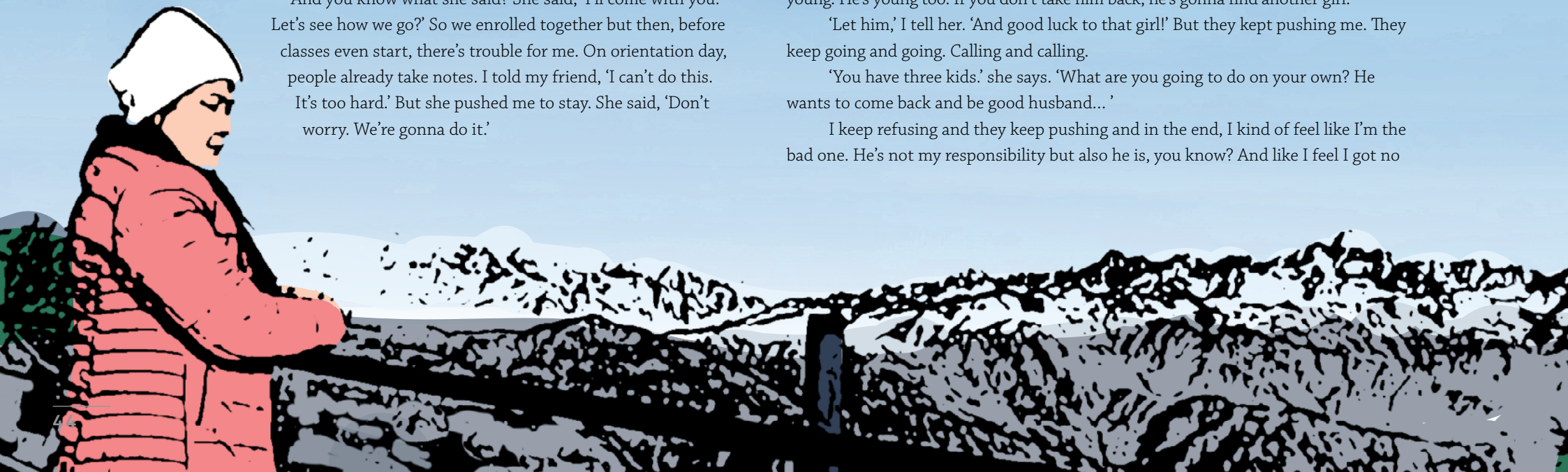
So at that time in my story, all was going good. For two years, I didn't talk to my husband, he didn't talk to me. No conversation, nothing: not even with the children. Then, it changed. My husband become a problem again.

He was living with this Nepali couple from the church community and had stopped drinking for a long time. Sometimes the wife would ring me to tell me how he is doing and check in. She started saying things like, 'He's changed now. You are still so young. He's young too. If you don't take him back, he's gonna find another girl.'

'Let him,' I tell her. 'And good luck to that girl!' But they kept pushing me. They keep going and going. Calling and calling.

'You have three kids,' she says. 'What are you going to do on your own? He wants to come back and be good husband...'

I keep refusing and they keep pushing and in the end, I kind of feel like I'm the bad one. He's not my responsibility but also he is, you know? And like I feel I got no



choice too. I got the 3 kids and I start thinking that taking them from their father is not fair.

So we started texting each other first and I agreed to meet up and see him. I didn't feel any excitement. After eight years of marriage and all that he has done, I just give it a try for my kids, that's all. Not for myself.

But it's no good. In two or three months he's drinking again and sleeping in the day like before. And the anger comes again. I was just studying then, not working, and I got to pay all the bills. I can't control him anymore. There's no-one to help: no family here only in Nepal. I don't know what to do. So I call an official who do the visas and told him everything. I asked if there was any chance he could send my husband back to Nepal because he is not changing here. He said no, he couldn't. I started calling more people in the community to help but he is too much for them too.

So then, I called my case worker at Bonnie's again. I told her everything. I told her how I had let him back and how I knew I had to kick him out again. She helped me send a message to him. And this time I know for sure that I don't have to live this way anymore. I think, 'Two years I live and do well without him being by my side.' And I told myself 'For the rest of my life I can do it.'

*I wrote him this...*

*'I don't wanna wait for you to destroy everything again.  
You gotta change for yourself. You have to move out.'*

He accepted and found a place. I paid the bond and he was gone. And straight away, I feel free, more free. When that kind of trouble is not around you, you have a different energy, different feeling you know, without even a tiny bit of fear. It's easier to make a decision.

And now I'm working, we have our own place, my kids are good, I drive and have my own car.

I will continue making this good life for us. I want to take them travelling and get us our own house. I am strong.

But our future is not simple. My husband is not my responsibility anymore but he is father to our kids so I know my story doesn't end yet. He's not my responsibility but he is my responsibility, you know? Always he will be trying to come back. Forever now, I will be saying, 'no.' §

#### After sharing her story...

When I was reading my own story, it made me emotional and a little bit shocked too because I never thought that I was going to read my own story one day.

Whatever life took from me, in return it gave me a lot of things, freedom, independence, joy and the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends by going out, I know life is never been easy and it never will be easy.

And whatever life throws on your way, you just have to clear the way and keep going, live your life and enjoy, be a better human being.

Thank you.

## BUTTERFLY'S STORY

## I can fly



*The symbol of freedom*

*I can identify with a butterfly.*

*My whole life was in a cocoon.*

*After the cocoon broke, I slowly got my wings back.*

*They began growing, flapping, and I learned how to fly.*

*My dream is to discover and explore the world like a butterfly*

*For the rest of my life.*

*That's me!*

*Butterfly*

**Butterfly's story begins long before she became a wife and mother. It began the moment she was born a girl, in Bangladesh. Compared to most other stories in *Home Free*, Butterfly's new life and freedom is quite recent and still unfolding. She has learnt how to fly. Can you hear her wings flapping?**

I was born first time in 1988 and then second time, in Australia when I was 32. That's when I start loving the person who I am. I realise then that if I can hear my own voice, then the outside voices stop. That if I can really care for myself, I can understand who I am and what I want from life. When I am strong, I can decide everything.

## Bangladesh... the beginning

I was born a girl and that was my fault. My mum wanted a boy. She come from a very big family with poverty and eight sisters. For her, girls are a big weight for a family: they are very dependent. She was anxious, always anxious about what might happen and shared stories which were not appropriate for a child to hear. I will not say it was her fault she told me these things: she goes through a lot as a woman. But her voice was with me always. She would say I was 'very weak mentally' compared to other kids: stupid, no sense. I was scared of even little things.

When I was going to college, I met a man who was about 30 years old. I got a crush on him. His face was nice and handsome. I was 16 years old then, maybe 17. I really like having coffee with him and going window shopping together. One day we fast kiss and I tell him, 'No more, I'm not ready.' He was not happy with that and next time, he made different excuses that I should visit him at home. He say he got hurt, he say he sick. I take some fruits and go there to talk with him but he isn't sick.

I tried to stop him. I beg him to stop but I couldn't. I was not even knowing that this was rape.

From that time, everything is different. I told my mum and she is telling me it was my fault. 'Why you go with him? Why you having relationship? That's why it happened...' I feel shame. Was it my fault? I don't know...

We told no-one else. It's a rule breaker right? Like, man can do before marriage but girl can't. No one will marry that girl. In our society, it's like that girl is used: like a used tissue. I feel like I'm a used tissue for a long time.

For many months the man wouldn't leave me alone. He kept stalking me and blackmailing me for more sex. He kept pushing, pushing. He say he has video of us kissing and will publish and my dad will never be able to show his face to anyone. Finally I surrender and meet him again and soon, he start hitting me, so badly hitting me. And I'm not telling my family anymore because I know it doesn't matter. No one will help me. I have to survive by myself. My father loved me, he might have



protected me but he was not willing. Maybe he was feeling shame, maybe he don't want to face the situation.

I am so scared of meeting that man again and him grabbing me that I stop going to college. I don't meet my friends. I stay in our house isolated from everything. I start making a secret plan to get out. I was using Facebook to find a man who can save me. I want to marry a rich man in a different city so I can start again. I don't think I deserve anything good but at least I get a life.

One man had good job and family and lived a long way from my home. He was 6 years older than me and wanted a family. He was ready for marriage. He asked me to marry him and I said yes. He had only seen a picture of me but I think I was very pretty and that was enough. Then he sent a proposal to my family. I met him and his family for the first time at our engagement. He told me I can start my study again later, in his town. And I'm happy about that because I am still afraid that if I go outside something's gonna happen to me. I'm always afraid.

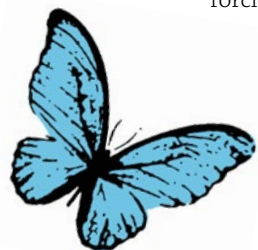
I was not living in my body at that time, you know? I was not feeling myself. One month later, on my marriage day, I was smiling but not knowing what was happening. I don't remember my marriage day at all. I was frozen...

## The cocoon...

After 15 days of marriage, we are in a new city and I want to go back to study. He say no. He say if I go to uni I will meet someone else. He's afraid of losing me. He want to be the only person to see me. Even my dad tried to talk with him but he say 'No, we will make a family first.' No discussion: the man is the head of the house in our country.

He was controlling over everything from the beginning. I had to always cover up: no dress, no jeans. Everything was his choice. He would take me home and forcibly make me change. I had my first baby before long and then, 4 years later, we move to Australia.

This is like a dream come true for me with new possibilities, but no, it's the same here. It was like I was his beautiful thing, barred, in a cage. He stopped me from talking with my parents. When I work, he take all



the money from me. I was depressed, isolated, lonely. The abuse was in everything: sexual, economic, mental, social. Two years later I had my twin daughters and my health was so bad, I was admitted to a mental health facility for three months.

In the hospital they diagnosed complex PTSD. They said it comes from my childhood, my previous relationship, my present relationship – all together.

## Slowly I grow my wings...

They give me a psychiatrist and medicine and a psychologist to work with me. I talked with her and everything come out. I start to meet with myself in a new way, not a shameful way, and I could finally understand that I was raped. After all that time, I saw it wasn't my fault.

I remember one woman there too. She was asking, 'Why we care about what men think?' That was the new topic. 'Why is everything about the man and not about you?' I didn't understand at first and for a long time, I couldn't make decisions. I was having confusion about what I want. Then, when I start connecting with myself, I realise I can take just one decision at a time: not need to decide everything at once. When I leave the hospital and go back to my family, I took one decision to tell my husband about the rape and what it did to me. After listening to my story, he was even more frustrated with me and was punishing me even more.

When COVID came, we were totally isolated: he has no friends, we're not mixing with people and I'm not allowed to phone my family. He was working from home and the pressure was very bad. The lockdown made every darkness come out: shouting, screaming, violence.

I had to move, get free and one day, I escaped to a DV service. But it's just me, without my daughters. The caseworkers helped me. They made me a safety plan and set up a bank account for me (my first one), so that when it was safe for my daughters and me to go, I'd be ready.

I stayed two weeks with that service and in that time they explained what DV is and that I was having it. I didn't know about DV before, I didn't know it had a name. That's when I realised if I stay with my husband, I won't be able to do anything. I will never be independent. I can't earn money. I can't study. I can't wear dress. Everything is under his control. I made one more decision...



## The cocoon breaks ...

The day we leave, oh my god, I was so nervous. I was shaking so much I could hardly use the key. I didn't know what would be on the other side of life for us, you know? It was like I must cross a big river and I didn't know what I'd find. Maybe it would be dark? Maybe I can't survive by myself? But

when I did go there, I could see so much green and light, a shiny kind of light. Like the sun is rising.

We got help first from the place that did the safety plan for me and then they refer us to Bonnie's\*. I feel so vulnerable and broken in the beginning. I can't look anyone in the eye but you know they are so kind at the refuge, like I am a child, their child. I feel only at your father house or your mother house can you get that shelter, you know? The staff would say. 'Come here, give me a hug.' Where else am I going to get that?

They wait until I am stronger and ready, and then they begin to push. They say, 'You need to be able to do this and you need to learn that. You need to be independent, you need go work now.' Isn't that like a parent teaching their child how to survive in the world?

At first we all struggle but when the worst days passed, I was hopeful that something good will happen. I was hopeful that I would be able to keep going no matter what situation. I make promise to myself. I say 'It's okay, I will take care of you.'

After the refuge, we moved into transitional housing and that's where we are now.

Since then, I choose to work, I choose to learn more and I choose to just keep going. No matter how many people, how many organisations support me, If I'm not willing and if I don't promise myself from the inside, I know nothing will happen.

So now I am learning every day. I have been doing my Diploma in Community Case Service management. My study makes me feel free.

My house is girl powerhouse now. All of us in own journey. My three girls going to school: one high school, two primary and I'm going to TAFE. I have friends now. I'm actually mixing with people. I'm experimenting like with a women's group.

I gave myself a new name name too. I picked it because it is beautiful and small not like the long religious name I was born with. I'm my own woman now and I'm truly not scared of anything anymore, right? And no more shame. I am telling my story because shame doesn't like it if I talk out loud: shame goes.

You know I said I was in cocoon, growing my wings and then one day, cracking it open so I could fly? That is me. I start learning and try to fly wisely and now I feel just like a beautiful butterfly and my present life is full of possibility, full of hope.

I can fly. §

## 12 months after sharing her story...

I am quite emotional after reading my story

"The shame goes away when we speak louder about what happened with us".

I am still keep going with my freedom. learning new things. I just realised one new thing nowadays; all hard time I go through it's teach me to be a stronger person, and to be a beautiful mother. And learning to be a better version of myself.

*from Butterfly*



\*Bonnie's is an Australian women's refuge and homelessness service