

Jody 2012

For the first time in years Jody's mum and dad feel they can go out for dinner together without worrying about her. Her son is able to plan an easy trip to Bendigo that might have been unthinkable a short time ago – or fraught with anxiety. It's been over half a year since Jody ended the physically violent and emotionally abusive relationship with 'A', but it's been only a few short months, the first she can remember, that she feels safe.

The compact black Bsafe GPS unit is her safety net. Her parents and children can finally, as much as possible, relax and get on with their own lives, knowing the police are a push button away.

At any hint of fear that 'A' is nearby Jody can activate her Bsafe unit. The activation goes directly to the Vitalcall call centre where her details will appear on the operator's screen. The operator will speak with Jody, or, if there is no reply, will immediately contact the police. This is a fast, discreet way of contacting 000 is protecting women and saving lives in regional Victoria.

The police, Jody says, have been fantastic.

'They've told me no matter when, to call or activate my Bsafe unit. I know that at the press of a button I'll get help.

'It might be a just little device with three buttons, but it's a lifeline for me. If you have no help or no way of getting help, within minutes someone will come. It's too late if I have to fiddle in my bag to find my phone, call 000 and explain everything. It could be too late.'

Jody lives in a Victorian regional centre; her parents are in a small town fifty kilometres away. A long way to come to respond to a distress call. They've done the trip many times over these last few years, and it's taken its toll on them both.

'We are Jody's back-up through thick and thin,' says Judith, Jody's mum. 'Sometimes we've had to get the police or emergency, but it is mostly just us. When I was really ill, I wasn't fit enough to help. With Jody having the Bsafe unit, I could go home and recover. It gives me peace of mind that she has 24 hour protection.'

'We are a strong family. We help each other,' says John. 'But we can only do so much.'

Jody suffers panic attacks and anxiety. Despite her Intervention Order, 'A' has abused and threatened her while sitting in her car at the local shopping centre. Her shed and car have also been broken into – she believes it's 'A' but has no way to prove it. Either way, it terrifies her that he might be nearby. It's taken 26 times to finally be free of him; 25 unsuccessful attempts. Failing for so many reasons, not the least, fear, have left Jody bemused and guilty that she endured so much and for so long. As did her family.

Jody's dad tells of how he used to cry as he and Judith drove away from Jody's house. They knew what they were leaving her to and their inability to help their daughter tore at their hearts and made every day a day of ugly possibility.

Judith says their connection is so strong that she can feel what her daughter feels, even if they are miles away. When one gets sick the other one has symptoms. The last few years have been hard on Judith; she's had major surgery, and undergoes psychiatric treatment from both a psychologist and a psychiatrist. Her 'nerves' are bad, with symptoms both practitioners attribute to her daughter's suffering at the hands of a violent bully.

'I keep a 24 hour diary', says Judith. 'I can tell you all the times we had to go over there.'

Jody is 40 years old. She has four children; Damien 19, Aaron, 17, Sam, 12 and little Eliza, only five years old. Eliza is her child by 'A', who was conceived not long into their relationship. Eliza calls her father 'that man' or 'that bad man'. Recently Jody found a photo of father and daughter under Eliza's bed. The photo shows a toddler in the foreground and a not small man sitting behind her on the floor, his face totally scratched out by a sharp object. 'A' used to scream obscenities into Eliza's face if she came between him and his television set; calling her filthy names and shouting until she would run and hide under her bed. Jody too would hide from his rage in the confines of a dark wardrobe where his roaring was muffled, sometimes stopping only when he lost interest or turned his attention to another drink. Sometimes she stayed there for hours.

It wasn't always like that; 'A' found her at a low point; Jody's previous relationship had broken up and she had attempted suicide. Told her she was attractive and was affectionate, even loving '*everything a woman wants to hear*'. She fell for him and fell pregnant. A few months into the pregnancy the vicious verbal abuse began. He started calling her names – slut and whore, dog, c**nt, He took her boys away camping, got drunk and threatened to kill them, and her.

'A' drank all day, every day. He drank, smoked dope and watched TV. Later, when he had finally gone, the family found syringes in the shed – it seems he was an intravenous drug user, too.

Jody paid the bills, but he controlled the money, spending it on alcohol and leaving her short for food and essentials. The verbal abuse was constant and dehumanising, the physical violence '*we all copped it at some time*' was terrifying. 'A' would strangle Jody, pull her hair, punch her. He threatened the children and smashed Damien's stereo. He was possessive, screaming at Jody if she seemed to be gone too long at the shops, accusing her of lying and having affairs.

'He wanted us to himself; Eliza and me, and the boys gone'. Eventually the older boys did go.

Damien is a good looking, personable young man. Since Jody has finally freed herself from 'A', he and his brother Aaron have returned home. 'A' had pushed them out, by incessant threats, verbal abuse and physical violence. What finally drove them out of home and back to their father's house was seeing what 'A' was doing to Jody. That became too much.

Despite the relationship ending for good late last year, and the children returning home, the family's fear did not abate. 'A's threats remained real; they all hated leaving Jody.

As Damien prepares for his journey today he says, 'Bsafe has made a big difference. I can go out and feel ok about leaving mum. It has made a really big difference'.

Bsafe has eased some of the pressure from Jody's family but recovery is slow and wounds built up over years will take a long time to heal. Her 12 year old, Sam, is angry and aggressive towards her. He behaves in the way that 'A' did, but not around his grandparents, where he is generally calm. Jody understands he has so much bottled up, but at times it gets too much for her, she hasn't found anyone that can help her with Sam but at least he no longer keeps a bag packed, ready to go at any time.

Jody continues to be a full time mother and now works as a Salvation Army volunteer, once a week cooking for homeless people. It gives her a purpose, and she has already achieved two certificates. Now she has applied to become a volunteer financial mentor to women who have experienced family violence and with do a course to qualify.

She says, 'I know a lot about family violence'.

Ends.