

MALLERY JENNA ROBINSON

My name is Mallery Jenna Robinson. I have been living in Los Angeles County for the past five years, in Mid-Wilshire.

'I've grown up seeing violence.'

I grew up in a single mother home that included seeing my mom struggle for support from my dad, fighting with my dad. I can recall them having physical struggles. I remember his now-wife also getting combative with my mom. I've grown up seeing violence from my parents.

I also went through it myself. In my first relationship, when I was 14, I was physically abused. He was my first boyfriend ever. He was a couple years older. I was a freshman; he was a junior. He was the lead singer of a rock band. I thought he was cool and edgy. But he had a temper and that temper led to being struck multiple times from the time I was 15 until I finally was brave enough to leave when I was 16.

My parents met him when we first started dating and they instantly had red flags. I was being a little rebellious as a teenager, sneaking out the window and going and seeing him play in his rock band. When the abuse was happening, I couldn't be like, "Mom," because as far as she knew, we weren't together anymore. But the school knew, and they didn't feel like this is a relationship they needed to really prioritize. This was 2004-2006, an era when trans identities were not visible. They did not take the relationship of him and I as a relationship that warranted concern about domestic violence. It was like, "Deal with it yourself." It was hard.

So many of us, we get in relationships with people that we hope we know. If the emotional intelligence, maturity, communication style isn't there, it leads a lot of times to domestic violence. It started with verbal abuse. Initially just, "You're taking too long," "That sounds stupid," low key putting me down. After a while, it became more derogatory, more direct. Then it became physical. That was my first time with that kind of experience. Then I ended up marrying someone who became verbally and physically abusive as well. There has been this series of traumas from childhood onward.

'I knew I had to get out.'

I did not think my ex-husband would become abusive. He was a Navy man, comes from Pennsylvania, very privileged background. He came off very clean-cut, all-American, white bread. If you looked at him, you wouldn't think he would ever lay a finger on his own. He's very unassuming. After we

got married is when I saw a lot more of my first boyfriend in him. It was maybe a month into our marriage, he got upset about something I said and literally tried to run us off the road. I got out the car, he chases me and slams me on the hood. This guy saw us and he's like, "You get off her right now or I'm calling the cops!" And he got off me.

I went back home to Alabama. My mom had warned me not to marry him. I'm still not listening, but they warned me. It was still so early on. His parents had been married for a long time. His sisters have been married for so long. I come from a broken home. I didn't want to add that to his family's reputation. They were already giving me grace, coming from a teen unwed mom. I felt this pressure to go back.

And I did. I really was very hopeful. This was someone who I trusted. We had been together several years before. It wasn't like he had been abusive throughout those three years. He had his moments where he would get frustrated, but never physical. That happened once we got married. I went back and stayed for another 10-11 months. Finally, I couldn't do it anymore.

The specific incident was his infidelity. He wanted to keep an open lifestyle, which I was not comfortable with. I'm so feminine and girly and petite and I love it. I'm a Southern belle; I own that. But I get a lot of masculine, machismo men. Then it's almost like, "Be seen, not heard." If I say something, it becomes problematic. That's what happened with him. I was like, "No. I actually don't agree to this." That's when he got angry. He slammed me on the bed. My ex-husband had these piercing blue eyes and they turned so blue – it was frightening. I can still remember to this day. That's when I knew I had to get out.

Once I left and before I moved, he was making threats like, "I can still get in the apartment." He was having the girl that he was hooking up with threatening me too. It got really sketchy, and I was like, *I'm sitting here going through this as a newlywed. I don't deserve this.* I thought of my mom. I thought of my grandmother. Even though she's been married to my grandpa for 60 years, my grandmother will still tell my grandfather to hit the road if he gets too out of line. I was like, *I can do this on my own.* I filed for divorce and moved to California.

'It was one time too many.'

I moved here in June 2019. I met C. in 2020, right after the shutdown and just after my divorce. Everyone was quarantined. We met that typical online way. He messaged me; I thought he was very sweet. He's a single dad of two boys. He was a lot older. I felt like, *okay, he's mature.* That's what I was hoping I would experience, but I did not get that.

It was very intense and quick. I was newly divorced. I was very vulnerable. I think I wanted that love. It was the pandemic. It was a lot of social variables happening at that time. He resented the fact that I was becoming a public figure. He also resented my ex-husband. I was so stressed about that, when you tell

someone you love something in confidence, something vulnerable, and they throw it in your face. It became very triggering because I'm trying to move on with my life. I don't want to re-live a divorce. That was when I realized that there was something deeper, like a resentment he had toward me that I couldn't explain.

In November 2020, I had this conversation with him about what I had experienced already and infidelity. He gets upset with me, tells me not to question him. I say that I have every right to since, at this point, we're sharing space. He smacks me in the face, and he puts his hand around my throat. Just looks at me like, "Don't ever question me about what I do." He was telling me I should be thankful that he was with me. It hurts so bad because I thought I had escaped that. To keep experiencing this...*what am I doing wrong? Am I a magnet for something like that?* That's what's so disturbing. They're so nice and so kind and then something switches. I'm putting my foot down and then this abuse happens. I don't know what to do.

That was the first time in November 2020. We stayed together until August 2021. I stayed a whole nine months. In January 2021, he punched a hole in the wall and told me next time it would be my face. It became racial too. He was Latino man and I'm a Black woman. He would say things like, "I could go get a white girl if you don't get in line."

It was hard for me to get out of that. I had to call law enforcement in order for him to finally leave. In August 2021, the final straw was what he said. For at least a year-and-a-half, I kept asking, "Please let me meet your family." I asked him, "Can I meet your kids?" He said, "You're never going to meet my kids. You're nobody." I was like, "You've been stringing me along." I was being very transparent. I've been married. I've met in-laws, so you're not going to keep me as a secret trans girlfriend. You're not going to do that to me. I can't pretend I know Latinx culture. I can't explain what it's like for him. I don't want to seem like he didn't have the right to be cautious. But after over a year, after the physical abuse, after the cheating, and I still put up with it. He insulted me verbally around my HIV status. He insulted me around my trans and racial status. It was one time too many. I knew that wasn't going to change.

He came back over after I left his house. I wanted him to get the rest of his stuff. He said this was still his home. He didn't want to leave. "You're going to have to make me leave." He was holding me, restraining me, pushing me over on the wall. At that point, I'm like, "I have to call law enforcement." That's when he started rapidly packing up his stuff and getting out and cursing me out at the same time. He left as law enforcement arrived. They asked me for some of his information, but I told them I didn't want to press charges.

'There's still so much trauma within the community.'

I told myself in 2018, when my ex-husband did what he did and I filed for divorce, *I'm moving forward. I'm never looking back.* I told myself, *if I could survive a divorce, I could survive any other relationship that came my way.*

And I have. I let go with C. To those who are listening, to those who are reading this, know that if you're surviving in a relationship right now – maybe you're staying out of fear, maybe you're staying out of necessity because you don't have anywhere else to go, maybe you're staying because you two share a pet or a child together – know that there are resources. There's The Trevor Project, Trans Lifeline, the LA LGBT Resource Center, Safe Space, all of these organizations and resources for intimate and domestic violence. That goes even for our community members who are sex workers, who are also survivors of sexual abuse.

I would love for the County to create a workshop, a holistic healing workshop because there's still so much trauma within the community. We know right now there is a rampant rise of mental health issues in Los Angeles County, as well as throughout the entire world. It is our due diligence to make sure that we raise awareness around intimate partner violence. I don't want to get too gender specific, but I do find it's important, based on the numbers, for it to be more female-centric. We need to make sure that as we create these events, let's prioritize our female victims – trans, cis, non-binary feminine, intersex – getting them those resources first and foremost because we are the most marginalized with this epidemic.

When you've been a victim and a survivor of intimacy violence, it's hard to trust the next partner. It gets harder and harder, especially as the number count becomes greater in the frogs [column] and not the prince. I don't know of resources that center around how you trust a new partner after that. So many times people say, "Don't bring the trauma with you." But the trauma is always going to be with you. It's like the saying, "You may forgive but you don't forget." You can't tell someone to ignore that kind of trauma and not bring it into another dangerous relationship – that's part of their journey. There's ways of coping, but what are they? Where are those ways for women of low income? What are those ways for women who are undocumented? For those who are dealing with neurodivergences and disabilities? There's so many different factors and variables that we need to get awareness for. We see it in so many communities. Or like in my case, I'm a younger girl with an older man. What are the resources for that? Maybe there is someone else who can relate to that. I want to meet that girl, if she's wanting to meet me; maybe we can form a sisterhood. Maybe we can figure out how to trust together. Those are the things that we have to start working on.

'I have felt so voiceless.'

I moved here in 2019. I got into transgender and HIV healthcare advocacy. It was important for me to really make sure that I talked with my community, getting those testimonies. One of the testimonies was, "I am so tired of us getting murdered and being blamed for our deaths." When we do get blamed in the media, it's 'such-and-such dressed as a woman' and that's pretty much the only media coverage that one gets. For me, it was important to be the change I want to see. So *Hateful Homicide*, my true crime

investigative journalism podcast, was created. It's the only true crime investigative journalism podcast and YouTube series that focuses on the hate crimes and murders of our trans community members in the United States and abroad. We shouldn't have to have a show about this, but it was important for me to make sure that we had something. It's been really impactful.

I have my transgender empathy trainings. I provide trainings on how to have empathetic approaches and strategies for connecting with the trans community from healthcare settings to schools. That came from our beautiful community saying, "I'm tired of going to get my HRT shot, my hormone replacement therapy, and being misgendered or they're not using the correct pronouns." I was like, "There needs to be more trainings in these spaces." That's how that came to be.

It's interesting when speaking about violence, I'm still getting comfortable doing that. I'm always talking first about coming out as trans and then being a trans youth and my journey. I talk so much about the journey parts that I don't really get into the interpersonal relationships. Therapy has been really healthy and cathartic because I have felt so voiceless in every relationship I've been in. From my first boyfriend smacking me in the face to my ex-husband slamming me into the hood of a car. Whatever this is, I want to make sure I do my part as the common denominator to do something different.

If this helps, I will tell anyone in LA County, you are not alone. Don't let what you're going through right now determine what you go through next in your life. Know that you are not alone. Know there are many voices who have experienced the same thing and are experiencing the same thing. Love yourself. Speak up. Do not stay in silence. Most importantly, know that resources are here.

Recorded at:
Los Angeles County, CA
07/03/24
4:00 PM

