




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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### **DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (5.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Domestic and Family Violence and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. I thank my good friend and colleague Tracy Davis MP for being the driving force behind the *Not now, not ever* task force. I am pleased that the current government is adopting the recommendations of the report.

Ordinarily I would not have told the story I am about to tell, but what prompted me was when another member in this House said that they seriously doubted that there was anyone in this parliament who had been a victim of domestic violence. Well, you are wrong. Let me tell you Barb's story.

Barb was a beautiful 23-year-old schoolteacher. She came from a loving Catholic family where her father was a school principal and her mother was a true lady. She had never known violence in her sheltered life, but for the next 35 years it became the norm. She moved to a small country town and was a real catch. Not long after arriving she met a dashing, handsome champion footballer. He was smart and charming and could dance like Fred Astaire. Very quickly they fell in love and married.

Barb saw his temper every now and then when he had been drinking but put it down to disappointments in his life. He had escaped the family farm and become a pilot and was playing football in the big smoke, but he got called back to work on the farm and his dreams died. Three little girls followed in quick succession. Even when she was pregnant and he had locked her in the nursery for three days without food or water or somewhere to go to the bathroom, she did not tell anybody and she did not leave because she loved him.

It did not take long for the violence to begin. At first she thought it was her fault—that she was not good enough, that she must have done something wrong—so she would go to mass and pray that things would get better. She did not tell anyone because she had taken a vow and she was ashamed. She did not tell her sister or her parents. She thought she had made her bed and she should lie in it. She did not leave because she loved him.

Friday and Saturday nights after the pub closed were always the same. The family would wait for the car door to slam and then wait for the violence to begin. It generally began with the evening's dinner, which was being warmed on the stovetop, thrown against the wall and then the fists would start to fly. Barb would try to get the three girls in bed before he came home, but that did not always protect them. The girls had vivid memories of these nights—nights when one of them would run to the neighbours to plead with the man next door to come in and stop dad hurting mum, nights when the violence was so bloody that the police would come. They would quiet things down and then leave, and retribution always followed. So the family stopped calling the police and Barb stayed because she loved him.

One night the two older girls awoke to hear the most pitiful sound, like the sound of a wounded animal. They went into their mother's room and saw her sitting on the bed, sobbing and holding a chunk of her scalp and with a large bleeding wound on her head. She could not work out how she could go to

school the next day and hide it from her fellow teachers. The girls found a chocolate box, took the green ribbon off it and helped her fashion a headband from the ribbon so that no-one would know.

The girls were sworn to secrecy. The girls were used to making up stories about their mother's bruises or their bruises. The girls were taught to be ashamed of their family's dirty little secret. Many a night the older daughter would try to stop the baby from jumping up and down in her cot and giggling, because she was too little to understand that it endangered them all. The baby thought it was a game when the older sisters hid her under the bed or in the wardrobe.

One night that still brings nightmares was waking up and hearing Barb pleading for her life. The oldest girl's job was to hide the carving knife with the red handle. No-one told her to do it; she just knew that she should. That night the girls had forgotten to hide the red knife. The middle daughter remembers standing behind her father, who was wielding the red knife. She remembers picking up the metal extension of the vacuum cleaner and saying, 'You kill Mum and you're next.' And with that she was thrown up against a wall and given a black eye—and it would not be the last time. She was seven.

The nuns at the school and the parish priests prayed for the family, and then they stopped asking why the daughters had bruises or black eyes. The local police knew, but in small country towns people mind their own business. Barb's family was one of a number of families in that small country town whose weekends were spent covered in blood. There were no family holidays. There were no friends sleepovers, because if they did they were terrified and they never came back and they stopped being friends with the girls.

When the family moved to acreage things got worse. With no neighbours, no-one could hear the screams. In the new house they all had their own rooms, with sliding doors along with passageway, and they would wait in dread as the first door slammed open and then the next and finally to the room of the middle daughter, who took many a punch meant for her mother.

Relatives knew and did nothing. Relatives even said, 'You must have done something to deserve it. You shouldn't antagonise him.' So many times the home phone was ripped out of the wall to prevent calling for help. There were many times, after being violently beaten herself, that one of the daughters would run three miles to the only payphone in the area to ring an uncle to come and stop the fists. Eventually, because they were sick of it, no-one came. And Barb stayed because she loved him.

Weekends were horrendous, but during the week no-one drank. They were a normal family. Without alcohol the father was the best father anyone could have. No-one ever talked about the violence of the previous weekend. It was never discussed, and life went back to normal and no-one ever said sorry.

For Barb it was all about the shame. She could not leave because she was Catholic. She could not leave because she would be taking the girls' father from them. She could not leave because she did not want her parents to know. She would often sob in between the blows and say, 'Why are you doing this to me? I thought you loved me.'

She tried to leave once, but he came after her and promised that it would not happen again. But it always did. No child should know what it is like to be hit with a fist like an iron bar. No child should know what it is like to be thrown up against a wall like a rag doll. No child should know what it is like to be hit in the face with an iron or have their jaw almost broken, their nose broken and earrings ripped from their ears. No child should ever know what it is like to be curled in the foetal position, covering their head whilst trying to fend off kicks to their stomach, their back and their head. The middle daughter vowed to never allow her mother to be hurt if she could stop it, but she knew that if she stayed then one night he would not stop and she would be dead. She left home at 15.

The girls eventually forgave their father. He died 11 years ago and Barb died four years later from a broken heart. I tell this story in memory of Barb. I tell this story because she was too ashamed to. I tell this story through the eyes of a child and I tell this story because I was the middle daughter.

Barb's favourite prayer was, 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference.' She could have changed it but she did not. She chose to stay. She did have courage, but it was not courageous to stay. She should have had the wisdom to know what lifelong effect her decision to stay would have on her three girls.

As politicians we are all appalled by domestic violence. The media spotlight quite rightly is now on domestic violence. The danger is that, as with everything, once the media dies down the victims are forgotten until the next shocking incident. So when we as politicians tonight or at the end of the week go home to our families, where I truly hope that none of you is a victim of domestic violence, just remember the children of domestic violence whose experiences they will take with them throughout their entire lives.