

## **Falling down the rabbit hole and my story of hope**

June 2022

It's a hot summers day in Mid-June 2022, my husband and I are on our way for a weekend away on the coast with our two dogs. Bliss.

A stark contrast to 3 years ago....

My story started at 6am on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2019 I remember it well, in fact it is a day I will never forget but will take me a long time to mentally recover.

I was woken by the dogs frantic barking downstairs. I grabbed my dressing gown and ran downstairs, any knock on the door at that time of the morning comes with a deep feeling of dread that somebody close had come to harm. I opened the curtains and looked out, there were maybe 4 or 5 people outside, I opened the door and a female showed me an warrant ID card which said she was a police officer, I knew something terrible must have happened, I started to shake, what has happened, who has been involved in an accident?

I let the officers in and very quickly I realised that this many officers would not attend to break the news that no one wants to hear. They asked if my husband was in and I indicated that he was upstairs in bed, he suffers from deafness so was unaware of the commotion downstairs. I asked what was going on and the female officer tried to calm me. Two officers went to the bedroom and came back a few minutes later with my husband. I asked him what was happening, we weren't allowed to talk and he said he would explain everything to me, he was taken away.

It all happened so quickly, and things are still a blur, I established that he was being questioned about trying to arrange a meeting with a child. I asked if he would lose his job? Probably. I asked if he would go to prison? Possibly. Within 5 minutes of getting out of bed my world had crumbled.

You will never be prepared to hear those words. I was stunned and confused, surely there must be a mistake.....

The officers quickly got to work searching the house for all of our electronic devices, I was told that a specialist dog would also arrive, the dog could sniff out electronic devices.

I rang my work and said I was ill, this was no lie, I would let them know how I was tomorrow.

Another female officer arrived she was kind and made me coffee, lots of it. I assisted the officers who were searching the house as best I could I just wanted everyone to go. The search went on for hours, maybe six hours. They told me that they would need to speak to my husband's children. I did not understand why but they were insistent, the children were both adults in their twenties and they both had children of their own. I was told that they would need to talk to them because of the nature of my husband's arrest and because of safeguarding issues, the day was just getting worse.

My life as I know it was over.

I explained that if the police were insistent on telling the children then my husbands ex-wife should be contacted as she would need to be there for their children. She came to the house and I explained what had happened and she stayed with me, she was shocked and angry, understandably so, but I was so grateful that she came as the children would need her.

I called another friend who said she would come over and stay with me and I had to explain everything that had happen, again she was shocked.

I spoke to the lady officer I was devastated, I said that he had thrown everything away, I was angry with myself that I hadn't noticed my husband behaviour, I was angry with him that he had lied to me, we hadn't even been married for two years and now it looked like he had been keeping a massive secret from me. Strangely enough I was furious that he had started to smoke again, on many occasions I would arrive home and ask him if he had been smoking and he always denied it, but today when they took him away he wanted to take his tabaco with him. So, he had been telling me blatant lies, unimportant lies now in the scheme of things.

I was told by the lady officer that he would probably give a "no comment" interview following advice from a solicitor. However, at the start of the interview he did say that he was hugely relieved that he had been found out as he did not know a way out from the position, he found himself in. He said that he had been living a depraved fantasy which had grown from an addiction to regular pornography to more extreme pornography, that he was ashamed and sickened.

This addiction had been going on for years, since he was a teenager, may be due to him sneaking into his brothers rooms and looking at the magazines he found in there, maybe due to an incident which he had been subjected to as a much younger boy which had not been handled well. But recently the internet had enabled him to access pornography easily and he didn't need to look too far to find it.

Like any other addiction he became accustomed to the usual high and went in search of a new high, exactly the same way as a drug user would be looking for the next high or a gambler would always be chasing the loss and upping the stakes in the hope of the big win, just one more spin of the wheel, I'm feeling lucky.

My husband's luck had just run out. Following a dopamine fuelled online conversation in a chatroom with a newfound "friend" who was in fact an undercover police officer, he had taken the bait and we were on the verge of losing everything.

Later that day he was released on bail and would need to return for an interview when they had looked at all the devices. I packed a bag for my Husband and his Brother came and collected it, he also collected him from the police station and took him home to his house, I did not want him in the house I was sickened. It was agreed that he would stay away as I was not ready to see him although I wanted an explanation and no more lies. I was relieved that he had his brother to look after him as I was worried that he may try to harm himself, but his brother and sister-in-law kept an eye on him and I am so grateful that they were there for him. I was in no state to have to worry about him I was in survival mode now.

The following week I returned to work and confided in my friend and workmate, I could not tell her the truth, but she could see that I was distressed. I said he had been suspended from work following an "incident", that he had been behaving inappropriately at work and I had thrown him out of our home. I hated lying but had to know exactly what I was dealing with, after all, this may be a huge mistake, and everything would be fine. I could see she didn't believe me; she knew me too well.



You may well ask, what is the train about.....more about that later .....

## Summer 2019

*It was the summer of 2019 and following our wedding in January 2018 which we had organised ourselves, we decided that as it was my Birthday we would dust of the wedding gazebos and have a celebration.*

*It was a busy few week. Get the garden straight, put up the gazebos, send invites and arrange food. My husband was semi-retired and worked part time, I had a busy full-time job; I was the main bread winner and it worked well. My husband would start work early and get home early, do some gardening, start the tea, clean the car and do retired stuff. I would start work later and usually call him about 5 and say how long I would be, he would put the kettle on.*

*One day I rang, no reply, redial, no reply, retry, no reply, retry, engaged. Invariably he would ring me back just before I got home when I said I had rung several times he said he hadn't heard the phone, it was on charge, it was in the shed. Oh, never mind. The teas not been started, and the washing is still in the washing machine, never mind.*

*I would meet my sister on Sunday mornings and one Sunday it was arranged that his daughter would come for tea, I got home and the tea hadn't been started and the kitchen was just how I left it. He had been watching TV all morning. On this occasion I was annoyed.*

*We had booked to go on holiday to France, I would go to work early, finish work early He would load the car and tidy the house. Everything would be done I would get home, change and we would leave with plenty of time to spare to get tea on the way to the port. Again, nothing had been done, this time I was angry.*

*On the plus side he was always happy for me to spend time with friends, do I want a lift, do I want to be picked up it was never any problem.*

I can't remember how long it was before I saw my husband, like I said there were weeks which were just a blur. Eventually when I did see him, I asked him to tell me everything. It was an emotional and difficult conversation; I could not believe what I was hearing but he promised me that he had not tried to arrange to meet anyone. But there would be indecent images of children on the laptop, he was sure of it

I told him I would support him but if it later turned out to be a lie, that he didn't tell me everything now then I would be gone, he would be on his own. I told him that I didn't know if we would stay together even if he was telling me the truth there would still be no guarantees that I would stay. The jury was still very much out.

I told him that the house would need to be sold, I needed to feel secure financially and mentally as the offence he was being investigated for carried a custodial sentence. Even a lesser charge may result in a prison sentence. I was not going to be left struggling on my own. He went back to his brothers to stay as I needed time on my own and try to unscramble the mess and I needed to be in control of this.

He met with his grown-up children. His daughter's world had been rocked but she has been a great support to both of us, I think she was relieved that I was still there and would keep her dad thinking

straight. Things have been challenging, she has accepted what has happened but she knows what a wonderful father he has been to her and she knows that life is not always perfect. She is real credit to both her mum and dad. His Son was less accepting but we hope that he will be able to rebuild the relationship in the future. At the start, I had wanted to try to hold the family together but until his son is able to accept that life is not perfect, I won't be able to. I needed all my energy to keep my husband and I going, moving forward in the right direction.

For the next few weeks my husband would come to the house while I was at work and he would sort things out in preparation for the house to be put on the market. Every day, I would go to work, he would arrive at the house and when I got home, he would be gone. The house was put on the market and it sold very quickly, the very same day it went on the market. We purchased a smaller house and I knew I would be able to manage on my own financially if he was to go to prison. If he did receive a custodial sentence, I was prepared for the fact that our marriage would not survive this. The house sale completed and we moved just in time for Christmas. This move was by no means a fresh start for us, it was literally a roof over our heads convenient, and put us in a better position financially. The house move kept my mind off the terrible reality that my life was falling apart. He had a bail appointment in December but he was told he did not need to attend and a new date in January was set when he would need to answer Bail and would probably be reinterviewed. Christmas had arrived. Even under normal circumstances I was not a fan of Christmas, this year I was dreading it. I hadn't told any of my family what had gone on, what was going on or what may happen. They were all surprised that we had moved house suddenly but we just said the house was too big for just the two of us. On Christmas day we had to pretend everything was ok, we were both exhausted, physically from the house move and mentally from everything else that had been going on we had dinner and fell asleep on the sofa, no board games and no chilly Christmas Day walk.

Between Christmas and New Year was a very dark period, I thought my husband had given up and I was worried that he may consider harming himself. He was distraught about his children and grandchildren and he missed them all terribly. We had planned to be away at Christmas but circumstances had made us getting away impossible. For some reason the police had seized his passport and refused to return it despite there being no bail condition to seize the passport, getting away would have made the world of difference to us, the stress of making excuses was all getting too much for both of us.

Christmas is only good when you can celebrate with family and friends, otherwise it is just an extended period of misery. Over Christmas I was increasingly concerned with his mental health, I was really worried he could disappear and take his own life. Right from the start he said he was going to face what would be his fate, but I really thought he was going to put an end to it all. The next day I woke up, he was still asleep, he woke up and seemed happier, things looked a little bit brighter today. The dark, oppressive Christmas cloud had passed but we both knew that 2020 would not be any better so we made our excuses for New Year's Eve, there was nothing to celebrate this year.

We knew that he would probably be reinterviewed when he went to answer bail in January so we just put life on hold again until then. We would know a bit more about what we were facing but you can't help thinking maybe it would all be ok; nothing would be found. It was always the thought that everything would be ok that kept me going but I knew that feeling positive would mean that I would have further to fall after the interview.

The day of the interview arrived, I was feeling sick and I knew he was feeling the same. I dropped him at the police station and went shopping. Well, not shopping, more like sitting in the car in a car park feeling ill, mentally and physically exhausted, dragging myself from the car, going into the shops

in a daze, staring at stuff but not registering what I was looking at. My mind was in turmoil, I realised I was barely functioning at all. I had been like this since the knock but today I realised the impact this was all having on me and my mental health. I went back to the police station and picked him up, he said that he was fully expecting to go to prison. They had found about 600 images (copies) in all three categories A,B and C and he had sent images(distribution) of all three categories as well. This was just getting worse, they had found an old hard drive from his old computer in the attic and this is where the majority of the images had been found, they said that the attic hatch was screwed shut because this was where he had hidden the hard drive and the police told him they believed that he would try to access the images on the hard drive at a later date .

We drove to the coast and I could not even look at him. I was devastated and furious with him, why hadn't he just got rid of the hard drive, he could have just destroyed it and things would have not been this bad, he really had ruined everything. I wanted to just drive away and leave him there, never see him again, I really didn't care what he did, I had to save myself.

That will teach me for trying to be positive, that everything will be ok. It would not be possible for me to fall any further, this was my rock bottom now, or so I thought.

I looked at my husband, he was in a worse state than me, we were both so badly broken, there was no way we would get through this. I also knew that if I left him there in that car park he would probably never come home.



I couldn't handle the thought of that situation either. He had not done all of this on purpose, he was an addict and without support he would not recover. I knew what addiction could do to people, it often ended lives and tore families apart. I had always been brought up by my parents to be a good, kind and forgiving person. I asked him if he could drive us home.

My husband had managed to find a counsellor who specialised in addiction, she confirmed that his addiction to porn had progressed so far that he was now drawn to more extreme images resulting in him viewing Indecent images of children (IIOC) He felt comfortable enough to talk about both his addiction and what in his life had started the addiction. Every week he would talk to me about what had been discussed with the counsellor and what had triggered the addiction and although there were some difficult conversations at least there were no more secrets. Addiction is so easy to fall into, but once you are in there it is almost impossible to get out of it and you really cannot function without that dopamine hit.

I was married to and living with a functioning addict.

As in other addictions, his actions had now resulted in him acting illegally to get his kicks. I wasn't finding bottles of vodka filled with water, money missing from my purse, money going missing from the bank account shady people coming to the house demanding money, this addiction was flying well under the radar in stealth mode.

We all spend too much time on electronic devices and his behaviour was going unnoticed to me, to anyone. I locked down the internet server to prevent any sort of porn being viewed on the television, I told him I could not trust him with a smart phone so he had a basic mobile phone only capable of making and receiving calls and basic text messages. We need to be able to access the internet so we bought a tablet which would only work on Wi-Fi and it was not allowed to leave the house. I would check the search history periodically and made it clear that if the search history was deleted then I would take the tablet off him. The most extreme media he could access was "Bob the Builder" and re-runs of the "Teletubbies". I also had access to all the bank accounts so as I could check that he hadn't purchased a secret device. These were harsh measures but he would need to go cold turkey now, there was no way I could deal with another early morning wake up call.

*One day I went out but five minutes into my journey I realised I had forgotten something, I returned to the house and went in the back door, he must have seen me coming back to the house, I found him trying to conceal something in the kitchen drawer, I looked in the drawer and found a removable hard drive. He remembered that there was some legal porn stored on it. The coast was clear and he thought I would be gone for ages. I asked him what he was doing, he said he was looking for the Sellotape as he was wrapping a present for me, I asked for the present, he was forced to tell me there was no present. Even though I knew there was nothing illegal on the hard drive I destroyed it, smashed it into tiny bits. It was the lies and deceit which made me so angry. I told him that if I became aware at any time that he had been looking at IIOC I would report him to the police myself and I would not support him anymore and he would almost certainly go to prison.*

This was going to be harder than I thought. ironically the hard drive contained an entire series of "Banged up Abroad" on it, one of our favourite programs. Basically, a whole series of programmes dedicated to easily influenced people, taking crazy risks, getting caught and spending time in the slammer. He was so close to that very same scenario. Whilst the contents of the hard drive were legal, it was exactly what has lured him down the wrong road in the first place, there is a fine line between legal and illegal and it was too risky to even have access to legal porn as it may drive him to go in search of more extreme material. At least with a drug addiction you can get methadone from the doctor to help you get off the illegal and dangerous drugs. A gambler can opt out of being allowed on web sites and betting shops. There is little out there for Porn addicts. He would have to go "Cold Turkey" and it would be hard.

At least now we knew what the charges may be, we were living on a knife edge waiting for a letter to arrive or a telephone call or he may even need to go back for another interview. At least we were fairly certain that the initial line of enquiry relating to him facilitating to meet a child had come to an end. He told me at the start that he had been living a terrible fantasy which had now turned into a real nightmare. Every single morning, I would wake up and the realisation that all of this real and not just a bad dream would hit me. I was amazed that I was able to get out of bed every day, I was stronger than I thought I was.

I had still not spoken to any of my family about this but I knew I should tell my sister. I met with her and told her what had been going on and she was stunned, her reaction was amazing she said that she would support both of us. She said people do make mistakes in life but this is a small part of the

person, the fact that he was seeking help to recover from his addiction is what made her want to support us. Things were beginning to fall into place for her, the sudden house move that we were so ill prepared for. The reluctance for me and my husband to join in at Christmas with games and winter walks, and me not always being able to meet up for our weekend walks as I told her I was too busy or had a cold.

Following the interview, I also told my very good work friend what had been going on and she was also shocked but said she would continue to support me but she would not support my husband as she couldn't accept what he had been doing. fair enough, I was so relieved she would be there for me.

My Husband and I both went to see the counsellor together, I was so upset and emotional, literally right on the edge of holding it all together mentally, she showed me a crystal and it was beautiful it had a large top with so many faces and underneath it was another point much smaller and I did not see this side of the crystal until you turned it over. She said it represented my husband the top was him and all the good things which were on show, how he behaved, his work ethic, his commitment to me, his family ties, his hopes and dream and our hopes and dreams. The bit underneath was where his addiction was buried, not visible to anyone, the dark side. I will always remember this crystal. She also told us that we should try to start making good memories again as we will need the good memories to get us through the dark times to come. She said that she could see that we were strong together, it reminded me of the crystal it was a pyramid shape, so long as we kept talking and there were no hidden secrets, we would get through this, I still loved my husband.

January 2020.

The news was on, the Chinese has broadcasted that they had identified a virus, it had started in a food market in a city called Wuhan, a number of people had died and they were trying to prevent the spread, people were being told to stay at home. Wuhan city was in lockdown. China was such a long way away it didn't really register in our thoughts too much. We both spoke to councillors at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation as we had been signposted to support which was available for men who had committed on line offences relating to child sexual abuse, but they also supported the partners and families of offenders. We both said that we would like to attend group sessions. He would attend a Inform plus a 10-week program of sessions for men who had committed on line offences designed to prevent the men from reoffending. I wanted to attend the inform sessions a six-week program to support the partners and families affected by the men's behaviours. We were both keen to start as soon as possible.

February 2020.

The virus had spread to Italy and the Italians were struggling to contain the virus it was so important that it did not spread any further. It was too late the virus had arrived in the UK March 2020.

The UK was locked down no planes were arriving or leaving and the nation was ordered to stay at home.

My Husband was able to continue with his counselling on Zoom but like a lot of organisations a lockdown was not something which anyone had worked with before. I think I got lost in the initial lockdown chaos, there would be no support for me for a while. Making memories was difficult when we were limited to going anywhere. He threw himself into decorating the house and tidying up the garden, he was showing incredible strength and working so hard to address his addiction. I was still on the endless emotional rollercoaster but he would try to keep me focused and positive. My mental



health was suffering badly. The lockdown continued until June and gradually life started to look normal, well, some aspects of our life were returning to normal. We hadn't heard anything from the police so we were still in limbo, making memories was difficult.

In mid-June a letter arrived, it was the charging notice; he was to be charged with making images in all three categories and also distribution in all three categories. None of this was unexpected but seeing it in black and white was difficult to take in. He asked the solicitor to ask the police to send out the summons we just needed to get on with this now. I would just be hanging on with all my strength now.

We knew that we would need to tell my parents, we had not done this previously as we wanted to know exactly what we were dealing with, prison was a real possibility so we had to explain what was going on. We went to their house, we both felt sick and I was struggling to hold it together. My husband explained what had been going on, what he was doing to address his addiction and how sorry he was for putting everyone through this horror story. They were amazing, I always knew I had amazing parents, but this proved it, they said they would stand by both of us and would support us and any decisions we made about our relationship, no taking sides or trying to make me make decisions, just support, for both of us.

We met with the solicitor and it was agreed that my husband would plead guilty at the earliest opportunity, there was no way he would be fighting the charges or trying to disprove the evidence, to try to reduce the number of images, it wouldn't make any difference to the outcome, it would just make prison even more likely and cost a fortune. He knew what he had done was unforgivable so splitting hairs would just take more time and prolong this agony. The hearing went without a hitch and a date was set for the sentencing hearing. It was in four weeks' time. Ironically, we had both now received dates for when our group sessions would begin with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. I just hoped that he would be able to participate in this important opportunity.

I was under no illusion that he wouldn't go to prison, prepare for the worst and hope for the best became my mantra. The next 4 weeks were spent finishing odd jobs at home which I may have struggled with if I was on my own, making sure I had all the car information, tax, MOT, insurance dates, access to all of our money, access to all of our domestic bills, packing a bag for prison, *packing a bag for prison, helping my husband to pack a bag for prison!* He needed to have all of his phone contacts, toiletries, pen, paper and envelopes, books, photos, medication. It was a surreal period of time. I knew that we may walk into court together and I could walk out on my own. It was like my life but in slow motion. I had written a brief letter to the court, I said that I was supporting my husband in his recovery, the measures we had in place at home to prevent internet access and most importantly what he had done to address his addiction to date and what he had planned to do going forward to make sure he did not go back to his old behaviours. The letter was brief but factual but most importantly from my heart, but I didn't know if the judge would even read it. My husband's brother and my parents both wrote similar letters at least the judge would know he had support, but only if he read the letters.

The sentencing hearing was scheduled for the morning, but was delayed until the afternoon, this was agony for me, even worse for my husband. This felt like my sentencing, for standing by him, me stood on a box with a noose around my neck just waiting for the box to be kicked away. I thought I was prepared for the hearing but it was worse than I could have imagined, I may as well have been in the gallows myself, it was as if the box had been kicked away, but it wasn't over for me I was just left hanging.

The prosecution explained the case to the judge, this was no sentencing hearing, this was more like a trial, they spoke about the circumstances prior my husband's arrest, this was unnecessary, he had pleaded guilty to all of the charges, so why were they doing this. The prosecution went on and on she can't even have read the summary as she didn't even know the date of the arrest, they spoke about the conversation he had had with the undercover officer, they called my husband a paedophile although he had not had any professional assessment done, this is what he had been labelled as by the police. This should have been stopped, it was a sentencing hearing, not a trial he had pleaded guilty. I was distraught, the judge could see this as he made reference to it but still it carried on. It was brutal, unfair and unnecessary and has caused so much damage to me mentally. The agony continued when I noticed a man slip into the back of the public gallery, it was a reporter, I knew my life would never be the same.

He was sentenced to a suspended prison sentence, a sexual harm prevention order, 35 Rehabilitation Activity requirement days, and unpaid work and also placed on the sexual offenders register. He deserved all of this. But I didn't deserve to be subjected to the unreasonable actions of the prosecution, I was urged by the police throughout the legal process to attend every court hearing which I did. It was irrelevant in the end, the next day it hit the press and then social media, we lived in a small rural village so following the media reporting the news spread fast and it was clear that people knew what had happened we were being ignored, it was getting worse and worse, the keyboard warriors loved it, sad individuals who live a virtual life all had to have their say. I didn't finish reading the press release and I didn't read the social media posts; I deleted my accounts and I would leave them to it I had a real life to get on with.

This train was in danger of being derailed.....



The next few days were terrible, my husband felt terrible but he knew that he needed to support me now, I had fallen apart, between the police, the press and the social media warriors I had been to hell and back I was destroyed. We took ourselves away for a couple of days to escape, we hadn't been anywhere for a year as the police had kept my husband's passport. We stayed in a travel lodge in the next county, I was in flight mode, my fight mode had now abandoned me, I just needed to be away. We visited a town and there was a crystal shop full of healing stones and calming auras. I could have stayed in there all day. The owner of the shop came to talk to me, she asked me what I was looking for, I said I needed something calming, she went away to help another customer and when she came back, she told me that I needed more than a simple calming stone she said she had been watching me and I needed a stone to give me courage and strength. How on earth did she know that.

The following week I returned to work, it was terrible, I was treated badly and my manager had said that he could not protect me from what was being said about me and how my colleagues were treating me, I stuck it out for 9 months but it was clear that I would need to leave.

The sentencing had affected me to such a degree I was barely functioning, I wanted to get into bed and stay there I was struggling like I had never struggled before. I wasn't that strong woman anymore. I was in fact suffering from PTSD I made an appointment to get help in the form of EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprogramming). This therapy would reprogram my brain and I would hopefully start to move on with my life. I am now able to talk about events and not lose myself to emotion.

A few days after the sentencing I started my Lucy Faithfull Foundation Inform course. I was still very raw, licking my wounds and trying to move on. There were two wonderful counsellors and five other ladies on the zoom course. We took it in turns to explain who we were and what had happened to us and our men. A year had passed since the knock and it wasn't until I heard the incredible stories of strength from these women, I realised how far I had come. They were mainly supporting husbands but one lady was supporting her son. We were all the same, we had chosen to support the men that we loved. Listening to their stories I realised not only that I had come a long way along a very difficult road, but these women were dealing with so much more than I had to. They had families, young children whose dads had been taken away from them. We do not judge each other, we support each other and respect what each other is trying to do, we were all in survival mode and we have all been on the same nightmare journey, we just weren't all sitting together. When the six weeks with Lucy Faithfull Foundation ended, we all exchanged details and we have continued to be firm friends, in contact most days and supporting each other through the tough times our group name is the Warrior Women and we are defiantly stronger together.

In the summer of 2021 things were still not good for me at work, I resigned, walked away from a good job. A few bullies were making me very unhappy but the managers were not prepared to deal with it, I would be better off out of it. We put our house on the market and decided that we would leave the area. I wanted to be able to walk down the street and not worry about what people would think of him, me or us. We were lucky we found a small house in a great area and a few months later we moved and we started to rebuild our lives.

Very soon after leaving my job I decided to put my CV on CV library and within days I received a phone call, I was interviewed and was offered a job. I thought I would never work again, I had been pushed out of my previous job and was at an all-time low. The new job was a 100% remote position I could work wherever I wanted. Things were slotting into place, things were looking up, I started work and my self-esteem and confidence returned and I was quickly, once again an independent woman.

My Husband is now retired and he looks after the house, cooking, cleaning and gardening (Trust me he has a very long to-do list!) and volunteering for a charity. He is an active member of SAA (Sex Addicts Anonymous) he has been sober from Pornography and other inappropriate sexual behaviours since his arrest (\*) He attends 2 meetings a week, makes telephone calls to other fellows every day and spends some time each day reflecting on the 12 steps in the same way that an alcoholic would. He has a good network of people around him and can reach out if he needs to. The other fellows are non-judgemental and all have found that they have an unhealthy attitude to sex and pornography. Some of the fellows have also been convicted for IIOC offences, some have been to prison some are waiting to see if they are going to be prosecuted, but they all support each other.

My husband is nearing the end of his suspended sentence but he will still be subject to the requirements of the Sex Offenders Register (SOR). I certainly don't view this as a nuisance, that is his punishment and I chose to stay. Our electronic devices are monitored and we will continue to get regular visits from the police who check that the devices don't point towards further offending.

My husband and I are so blessed to have wonderful people in our lives. Walking away may have been the easy way out, but I made vows when I got married so I chose to stay. Two thirds of marriages do survive this to become stronger more "honest" marriages. The other one third were probably already struggling with their relationship or this offence held too much stigma or maybe /deeply embedded memories of a past, they would rather forget.

It's been hard but we were lucky as we didn't have young children we were able to start to rebuild our lives. Other families have further battles with Social services to reunite their families and many other families have to cope while their partners are in prison, every story is different.

My husband has lost his son through his actions, he has lost his job, we have both lost friends, maybe they feel that being associated with us changes the way in which people view them. One thing is certain, how this crime is reported and the perception of it needs to change, and more awareness is needed to remove the illegal content from the internet as the men in any one's lives may only be one click away from losing everything. The police should have more understanding of why people commit this crime and provide more support. Sex / porn addiction is now recognised as a disease by the WHO, so why am I made to feel like I am a bad person for supporting my husband. I have learnt so much from this, I have suffered at the hands of the police, the media, the keyboard warriors, the public who don't even know me and friends who I thought were there for me.

I was right, my life would never be the same again, life is now different, dare I say it better in many ways. Don't get me wrong, it's not a bed of roses, I said at the start I would stay as long as things were going ok but I can't make promise about the future, I still struggle with the physical side of our marriage but things are slowly getting better. We spend more time doing things together like walking, decorating, gardening, enjoying nature, travelling, enjoying where we now live and talking about how we feel. We made the decision to move as we needed to recover from this, we want to walk down the road and be anonymous, be ourselves and get on with our lives, we have both become kinder, we do not judge people and we would love to be able to put a hand out and help anyone else who finds that they have fallen down this rabbit hole.

If just one person reads my story and they think a member of their family is about to fall down the rabbit hole, or one person reads this and seeks help to change their behaviour, or one wife, mum or sister gets comfort from my words then this terrible chapter of my life will have been worthwhile.

Maybe the online harms bill will make a difference, all Porn sites should have to offer signposting to sources of help and support to people who are struggling to control their sexual behaviours – but I guess pop ups about porn addiction just aren't that sexy are they? Better still, ban all porn on the internet. The social media platforms need to close down chat rooms where IIOC are exchanged, they need to be held accountable so any conviction relating to IIOC should also result in a conviction for the social media platforms otherwise it will continue to be the low hanging fruit like my husband and other men who face the consequence of falling down the rabbit hole

So back to the train.....



I started this journey on the train with my Mum, Dad and Sister, they have always been on my train with me, they have never got off. Other people get on and off my train there are lots of good times and happy memories. My train hit a really rough part of the journey, it's really rough, there were times when I didn't even want to be on my own train. My friend supported me through this really rough part of my journey, she was there for me even when some people got off the train. Other people got back on my train and supported me through this rough patch and I'm so glad they are back on my train. My good friend was right by my side for the really rough part of the journey and then decided she couldn't stay on the train if my husband was on the train with me. You will find this with your own train. I used to think that this train will always stop at the platform hoping she will get back on my train but things have changed now as she was instrumental in me moving away. There are others that are welcome to get back on, I hope this time the journey will be fun again. I don't blame anyone for getting off, it was a long and rough trip and I respect the decisions which people made just as long as they respect my wishes to stay on the train with my Husband.

People ask me why have I stayed; I don't have to explain my decision to anyone. I now ask them what would you do if it was a member of your family who committed this offence? Would they walk away? More often than not they haven't considered that question, and until they have walked in my shoes and taken the time to understand addiction and the depravity it can lead to then how can they judge me for my decision.

I know this has probably been a difficult read but you need to know how hard it can be, we were lucky my husband didn't go to prison, now that is a whole different level of misery but people do get through it. The most important thing is that we are ok, we got through it and you can too, be strong, be a Warrior Woman.

x

(\* ) Except for the incident I mentioned on page 7