

When it happened to me, it bore no resemblance to any of the five likely scenarios my parents warned me about.

He wasn't lurking in a dark alley, wearing a trench coat and waiting for this once unsuspecting and naïve little girl to walk past so he could grab me.

Because I stayed home for college—and by home I mean New York City—and worked full time, the fear that I would be attacked on campus didn't apply to me. When I took the subway alone—no matter what time of day, I didn't hang out at the back of the poorly lit station. As I got older and began going out with girlfriends to nightclubs and on dates with men, he never used my short skirt and sheer blouse to say that I was asking for it. He also never slipped anything into my drink or used my inebriated state as a reason to take me to the same dark alley I had done such a good job to avoid as a child.

Along with making me aware of the potential for danger, they also routinely reminded me that nothing I do, wear or say gives anyone the right to assault me—verbally, physically or sexually.

For all their good intentions to empower me and instill street smarts in me, the one scenario they hadn't considered was that when it did happen, I would know him intimately.

It happened on the eve of my 28th birthday. At the time I was living in Brooklyn, one of the five boroughs of New York City with my on and off boyfriend, Jeff*, of three and a half years. We had gotten back together for “one last try” four months earlier.

I had made a clean break from Jeff in May of that same year. A few months before I left, I had started seeing his extreme flattery of me one moment and his belittling of me the next as signs of his own insecurities and his need to control me.

By the middle of the summer I was doing well. I had gotten my own place—a turn of the previous century, six-story walk up to a railroad apartment, with a bathtub in the kitchen and a pull chain toilet in the water closet.

I had even gone on a couple of dates. I liked being desired. But more importantly, I liked being back in control of my life.

And then toward the end of August my mom died, unexpectedly. She was only 61.

Overcome by grief one moment and fear the next, I could feel myself becoming vulnerable. And then the inevitable occurred.

He called me.

While we were on the phone, he reminded me how much he loved my mother. I hadn't seen this as a way back in. I genuinely believed it. Jeff had had a long history with my family.

I first met Jeff in 1982 when I was 16 and he was 19. He and my brother were in a band together. Jeff played the electric bass. My brother provided the beat. They gigged all over Manhattan, including the now closed, iconic CBGB.

He was confident that when I was old enough, he would be my boyfriend. Then I met a guy when I was 17 and soon after I had a boyfriend. He told me it wouldn't last—that we were destined to be together. “We'll be the perfect couple. I'll wait for you,” he told me.

Although it was eight years later when I was single again, there Jeff was ... waiting for me. I mistook this for love and as a sign.

When he called the night my mother died, I was pretty susceptible. He reminded me of the decade-long friendship turned relationship we'd had that was full of good times, vacations together, season tickets to the New York Knicks at-home games, front row seats for my favorite musicians' concerts, and the parties we threw that were a who's who in the music industry.

Funny, but while we were talking, I couldn't remember a single bad time. None of the arguments came to mind. I couldn't recall the times I overheard him on the phone making arrangements to meet a woman, whom I knew wasn't his sister, mother or a fellow musician. I seemed to have forgotten about the times he scrutinized my choice of clothing—reminding me for the eleventh millionth time he couldn't protect me when I was out of his sight.

I admitted that I couldn't stand the thought of going to my mother's funeral by myself, which meant a flight to France (where my parents had retired to when I was 18). He not only went with me to France, which meant rearranging two weeks out of his insane schedule, he bought our plane tickets as well.

And with that, he was back in.

He seemed to have changed. He repeatedly apologized for driving me away in May. He tried every way possible to make it up to me and show me he wanted me to be part of his life for good.

He even proposed.

I was scheduled to have surgery to remove an ovarian cyst on the eve of my birthday, which is three days before Christmas. We'd discussed him taking care of me the best he could before he had to fly to Los Angeles for work.

Despite his desire to be a different person, he started reverting back to the person he is. In my heart I knew it was time to move on. I think so did he but it became the elephant in the room.

When he wasn't home, which had been more frequent, I called friends of mine to see whose couch I could sleep on for a few weeks until I landed back on my feet. It was my intention to leave as soon as I was physically able. My hope would be to do this while he was in L.A. I wanted to avoid drama.

The day of the surgery came and Jeff was very attentive, as one might expect. When we got back home, he tended to every one of my needs.

At some point I fell asleep. The painkillers were doing what they were supposed to do. A few hours later Jeff awakened me out of a very deep sleep. He wanted to have sex. Really? Of all the times, now?

Apart from the fact that I was high as a kite on Vicodin, my doctor had made it very clear that we should abstain for at least two weeks. In my very high state, I reminded him of this. He was there; he heard the same instructions I did.

Jeff didn't care. Not only did he rape me, he brutally beat my face, bruised my ribs and kicked me in the reproductive area—yes, just after I had had surgery there.

Even if I hadn't been high on painkillers, there was no way I could have fought him off. Jeff was 220 pounds. I was toast.

I have no idea how long the attack lasted. I am guessing no more than ten minutes, but it felt like an eternity. When he was done, he told me when I was recovered from the surgery and the bruises were no longer visible, I should leave. "You're no longer safe here," he said.

As if I needed him to tell me.

He flew to LA the next morning and left an envelope with several thousand dollars in it for me to use to start a new life. Odd as it may seem, I saw this as an indication that in his warped way, he actually did love me ... he just had issues and demons he needed to deal with on his own.

And he kept his word. He called a few times to ask how I was doing. I told him which day I would be moved out. True to his word he didn't return until after I was gone.

I ended up moving to Washington, D.C. rather than to another apartment in New York City. I needed to start over and reinvent myself.

I got a job and an apartment very quickly. I started into therapy as soon as I was settled into a new routine.

I asked my therapist how I let it get to the point it had. She was very clear that while I had ignored many warning signs, I hadn't asked for it and I had no control over his issues. She thought it was possible he was on drugs, had undiagnosed mental illness or both. I did share with her that while growing up he had seen his father beat up his mother regularly.

Our work together focused on me learning to recognize signs of an abusive and controlling person before it got to this level again and preferably to get to a point where I wouldn't attract this kind of person again.

There would be no again. I stayed in therapy for another year, and when we both agreed I was ready, I left.

While I was in therapy I met Paul, and after 20 years together, fifteen of them married, we have a very functional marriage. Many people tell us we are perfect together. I love him and he loves me and we are equals and partners in every sense, but I no longer believe in perfection.

I will take functional over perfection any day of the week.

In December 1994, just one day before I turned 28 years old, I became a statistic. It's estimated that one in five women and one in 15 men experience sexual assault annually. The person who did it was not a stranger but someone I had known since I was 16 years old. He was someone I had lived with and despite obvious signs he had—for lack of a better word—issues, I fell into a co-dependent relationship with him.

Rapists can be a stranger, a friend, a co-worker, a boss, a celebrity, a partner, a family member and even a spouse. It can happen to anyone regardless of sex, age, race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background or zip code.

It's important not to confuse rape with sex or love. It is neither. It is an act of aggression, borne out of a need to control.

Although my parents could never have imagined they would need to prepare me for this scenario, the only thing I know for certain is that it wasn't my fault.

This was originally published on the website Guerrilla Feminism. However they have since gone out of business.