



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **NEW BOOK HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR GREATER AWARENESS OF ONE OF THE MOST HIDDEN FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... FINANCIAL ABUSE**

Amanda J. Scott's new book, *Finding My Way Back To Me*, tells her story of how she freed herself from 17 years trapped in an abusive marriage.

With nowhere to go, isolated from family and friends, little access to money and two teenage daughters, Amanda J. Scott's new book, *Finding my Way Back to Me*, tracks her journey as she shares the 43 pivotal days it took over two years to find the strength to take back control of her world.

"I called the book, *Finding my Way Back to Me*, because when you have experienced abuse over many years, you lose yourself."

In Australia 1 in 4 people experience financial abuse, but research shows that it disproportionately impacts women.

According to studies undertaken by the UNSW one of the key problems is the hidden nature of financial abuse and that even now, because we do not have a clear definition of economic abuse in Australia, we have no accurate or consistent measures.

Other factors that make it challenging to identify are the gendered nature of managing family finances and the fact that for financial abuse to be identified and measured, the victims must identify as having been abused.

"It sounds strange that it would take seventeen years to realise that the way I was treated was abusive, but no-one wants to believe that they are unloved and uncared for, and so I constantly made excuses for my husband's behaviour, rather than accept that I wasn't loved, I was abused."

When Amanda first met her husband, she found it sweet and charming that he would call constantly to check where she was. She thought this was sign of love and a protective nature. Seventeen years into her marriage she realised that what she thought was love was full scale financial and psychological abuse.

"In my case the abuse grew slowly, and what started out as one incident of disrespect, became two and three until eventually it became the way I lived. I was told every day that everything I did was wrong, and so it didn't take long before I believed it."

In Amanda's case the psychological abuse enabled the financial abuse.

"I was told every day that I was stupid, a bad mother and should not offer an opinion about anything other than what went on in the house or the children. I was too scared to question my husband's decisions. All I wanted was peace and for the constant tension in the house to be relieved. So, I did as I was told, hoping that he would be nicer to me."



“In the end my decision to leave largely came about when I found out that my husband was being unfaithful and spending large amounts of money on other women. After spending years scrimping and saving and begging for every cent to spend on our family’s needs, I couldn’t comprehend the betrayal.”

“At this point I woke up and I realised that I couldn't do it anymore, and that I wanted a better life for myself and my children.”

Amanda experienced all of the common signs of financial abuse in her 17-year marriage:

- She was too scared to access accounts and credit cards because of the repercussions.
- Power of attorney was given to her husband and used to secure loans and credit in her name.
- The banking and finance for the business was controlled by her husband, which meant she had no means of escape.
- Amanda worked part time in the family business and managed the house, but was told that she made no contribution and was not entitled to any of the family’s money.
- Her car, that was in her husband’s name, was taken away at will.
- Economic sabotage – letting the bank take the business and the house as a form of punishment for leaving the marriage, when other options were available.

“Extracting myself from the marriage pushed me to my limits. With no earning capacity, I was terrified that I would end up on the street with my two daughters.”

“The thing I have come to understand is that the signs of domestic abuse are different for each person; however, collectively they often present as a total lack of power in the situation, where one partner has all of the control.”

**In my case someone would have looked at my situation and said:**

- You are never treated as an equal and your opinion doesn’t count.
- You are shamed regularly for being stupid, incompetent and a bad mother.
- You are made to feel as though everything is your fault.
- You have little to no access to money and need to ask for every cent, which means you can be cut off and left with nothing at any moment.
- You are responsible for debts that you didn’t agree to.
- You are denied regular access to friendships and shamed for having contact with anyone outside the home.
- You do all the work around the house, look after the children and work in the family business and you are still told you do not contribute, are stupid, and responsible for anything that is going wrong.
- You have the lowest status in the house, behind the children and the dog.



**Amanda is calling for more resources and research to be undertaken to make it easier to identify when people are victims of financial abuse. In her book she offers the following advice, based on her own lived experience...**

1. Real love doesn't look like or feel like control. It took me years to understand that if it feels like control, it is.
2. Listen to your gut feelings and don't talk yourself out of your own intuition to avoid making the hard decisions that will move your life forward.
3. Be across the family finances and do not sign anything without fully understanding what you are being presented with.
4. Don't give your power of attorney away to anyone.
5. Get independent legal advice - never from your partner's lawyer.
6. Stop feeling shame for things that aren't your fault and don't ever justify being treated with a lack of respect - disrespectful behaviour is always going to be disrespectful behaviour regardless of the 'why'.
7. Don't accept the blame for being the one who broke the marriage by hiding his bad behaviour from other people. I did this and as a result I was blamed by my children for the breakup and for ruining their lives. Abusers maintain their power by staying hidden. Not saying anything to other people allows them to look like a victim and make you wrong – again!
8. Don't tell yourself that you will stay for the children, as what we teach our children in that situation is that love equals abuse. One of my primary motivations for leaving the marriage was to teach my children about the importance of self-respect.
9. Maintain strong friendships as they can be the backbone of your path forward.
10. Start making your own needs a priority. For me this was being able to walk and connect with at least one friend. This was the only way I was able to stay the distance to get through the process.
11. Maintain your dignity and self-respect as you go through the breakup process. My pent-up rage and humiliation meant that when I got the chance, I turned from the abused into the abuser very quickly and found myself doing things that I never thought possible. After a few major incidents I realised that my desire for revenge was turning me into my husband – someone I would never want to be.
12. Regardless of whether you work or are a stay-at-home partner, you are entitled to half of the family earnings. I was always told I contributed nothing and was worth nothing. This simply isn't true for anyone.



13. Make a decision that you deserve a different life and then do whatever it takes to make that happen. This means finding the part of you that still has dreams for a good life and wants to leave more than you want to stay.
14. Nothing about moving beyond an abusive situation is easy, but every time your mind falters, tell yourself that you deserve more and keep going.

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**Amanda J Scott is an author who supports people who have experienced, or are experiencing abuse.**

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