

From survival to innovation: How my journey led to the creation of 'Ask Joan'

By Katy Longhurst, Ask Joan

Background

This is the story of how years of coercive control, stalking, domestic abuse, and systemic failures shaped the creation of Ask Joan – a silent, invisible safety system built for moments when speaking out is impossible. My experience is deeply personal, but I share it because it became the foundation of a solution now protecting others.

In 2010, I met someone who appeared charming, attentive, and generous – almost too good to be true. Within months, the façade cracked. Small lies, manipulation, and controlling behaviours emerged. He isolated me, twisted narratives, and used gaslighting to undermine my confidence.

In public, he was charismatic. In private, the control tightened. Coercion quickly escalated into full-scale monitoring and intimidation:

- Turning up at my workplace while claiming to be away
- Installing trackers, spyware, and bugging my home
- Having staff monitor me
- Financial control and £45,000 of debt
- Hate campaigns, burner phones, fake accounts
- Career sabotage, contacting employers, and fabricating allegations

By 2013, the abuse turned violent. A serious assault captured on CCTV resulted in no meaningful protection due to intimidation and fear. He repeatedly broke into my home, moving objects to make me question my sanity. Neighbours reported seeing him inside when I wasn't there. I later discovered he had been hiding in my cellar for weeks.

New Relationship

When I began a new relationship, the harassment spiralled:

- False emergency calls
- Malicious reports to social services
- Threats and intimidation
- Contacting military authorities with fabricated allegations
- Destroying friendships, isolating me further



There was no part of my life he didn't try to infiltrate or control

One of the most traumatising moments came when he took my son to manipulate me. He broke into my home, left my baby alone, and reported me for abandonment. The police kicked in my door and removed my child. My parents, manipulated by his lies, enabled access – and he abducted my son. The battle to bring him home was agonising and terrifying.

In 2016, he launched a brutal attack that changed everything:

- I was strangled
- My ribs were broken
- My 18-month-old son was thrown across the room
- I was pushed down the stairs
- I miscarried because of the assault
- My police-issued panic alarm didn't work – it had been disconnected without my knowledge

My neighbours hearing my son scream saved our lives.

That night led to emergency housing, but it was only three roads away. He found me within 20 minutes. I was then moved to refuge, followed by relocation to Northern Ireland with a new identity. Even then, he found me again.

Eventually, the Independent Crime Commissioner identified 169 separate police incidents mishandled across multiple forces. A lead detective was removed, and for the first time, someone acknowledged the scale of the harm.



Suicide Attempt

After a suicide attempt, I woke in hospital with a decision: fight or be destroyed. I rebuilt:

- Found new work
- Fought every further incident
- Secured legal support
- Reclaimed autonomy
- Became stronger and more determined

Even when harassment continued, including tampering with my car, I refused to give up.

Ask Joan

Ask Joan was born from one truth I learned through survival:

There are moments where speaking is impossible but the need for help is immediate.

Throughout those eight years, there were countless moments where:

- Holding a phone was too dangerous
- Speaking would escalate violence
- Devices were seized, checked, or monitored
- Reporting required visibility that put me at further risk
- Alarm systems failed
- I was isolated without safe options

I survived situations where a silent, invisible method to get help could have changed everything.

Ask Joan is designed for those moments.

Ask Joan is a discreet, silent safety system that lets individuals signal for help using household devices by activating a pre-set pattern that triggers a silent alert.

- No phone.
- No app.
- No visible tech.
- No speech required.

It is built for:

- Victims monitored at home
- Those who cannot safely speak
- People experiencing coercion or surveillance
- Parents needing a way children can also signal for help
- Anyone at risk in their own home

It is grounded in lived experience, trauma-informed design, and the reality of domestic abuse.

Ask Joan is transforming safety for women and families:

- "It's the first time I've felt safe in my home."
- "My daughter can flick the kettle if she can't wake me."
- "This will save lives."
- "A guardian angel for people like me."

It offers peace of mind, safety without visibility, and real hope.

Viviplu (Ask Joan) exists to build life-saving, trauma-informed technologies that provide discreet routes to help.

Our mission is simple:

No one should be left without a safe way to call for help.

We work with police, NHS Trusts, local authorities, and charities to ensure no one remains unseen, unheard, or unprotected.



Closing Comments

I survived.
I rebuilt.

And I now use my lived experience to protect others.

Ask Joan is more than technology, it is a promise that people like me are not alone, and that safety can exist even in silence.

Katy Longhurst

Please get in touch with Katy by scanning the QR Code

