



Phoenix's

40 Year Anniversary



2024

**Creating Compassionate Communities**

Changing one mind and one heart at a time

**CONTENT WARNING**

Some of the content of this publication has references to sexual violence. Please seek support if needed.

Lifeline Counselling - 13 11 14

Blue Knot Helpline - 1300 657 380

Crisis Care Helpline - 9223 1111

## The Story of Phoenix

Phoenix Support & Advocacy Service Inc. (formerly known as ISA – Incest Survivors' Association) supports those subjected to, and impacted by, child sexual abuse.

Our organisation proudly traces its roots back to 1978, when volunteers from the Women's Health Care House and Australian Women Against Rape (Perth) organised a publicised 24 hour 'phone-in' designed to give women who had been sexually assaulted an opportunity to speak about their experiences. Of the 150 calls, more than half related to intra-familial sexual abuse. The group of women who headed up the phone call-in formed self help and support groups after identifying that most of the women callers had been silenced and not supported by the people close to them. Many callers were profoundly depressed and had a mental health diagnosis. Individual counselling, as well as group counselling, commenced shortly thereafter, initially on a volunteer basis.



The Incest Survivors' Association Inc (ISA) was founded by one of the volunteers Nancy Rehfeldt in 1978 and was formally incorporated in 1984 via a grant obtained.

ISA was the first non-government association in Western Australia to deal specifically with child sexual abuse and the associated complex trauma that can emerge as an outcome from that abuse.

It was common for women in that period of Australian history to establish services for sexual abuse and domestic violence with funds they had raised themselves and to work in those services on a volunteer basis. These were services that were not provided by the Government of the day, however, would be considered now as necessary

services particularly, for vulnerable women and children escaping abuse and violence. Research studies into child sexual abuse and domestic violence have highlighted that these experiences are at times linked, and do not necessarily exist exclusively in isolation from each other. Women advocates, volunteering and lobbying separately in those two areas of social need, often joined forces to establish services, share scarce resources, and collectively advocate for social justice.

In 1986 ISA was offered partial funding by the state government to provide services to the community, recognising that the thousands of annual phone calls identified a large, hidden, community problem. From this time onwards ISA was able to employ paid staff, and all counsellors employed were required to have tertiary qualifications and clinical supervision, and ever since the Association has had contractual accountability provisions to State Government.

**The organisation operates as a non-government, secular, not-for-profit charity.**

ISA originally operated from the premises of the Women's Information and Referral Service (WIRE) in Perth and later operated from rental premises in East Perth until 2012

when ISA received a Lotterywest Grant of \$500,000 which assisted the organisation to purchase premises at 404 Walcott Street, Coolbinia. The property required extensive renovations such as painting, recarpeting, and rewiring however this work created a client friendly safe warm space for counselling and the building became operational from October 2012.



significance at the event was the unveiling of a plaque to commemorate the founder of ISA, Nancy Rehfeldt, with the premises now named Nancy Rehfeldt House. It was a great honour for ISA to have Nancy herself attend, unveil the plaque, and witness how far the organisation had developed since her unerring dedication to the services ISA offered.

In 2016, members voted to change the name of the organisation to Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service Inc., to represent the broader range of services now offered. The current logo created at the time of the name change draws on the symbols of the Phoenix mythical bird arising from the ashes, a sunrise that offers the hope of a new day and light emerging from darkness, while the heart represents a service that responds with compassion. At this time Phoenix also launched a new website, along with rebranded information and promotional materials.



Phoenix for many years had a contractual agreement with the WA Department of Communities, previously known as the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. The Department provided most of the funding for Phoenix services and still does to this day.

In 2017 Phoenix was delighted to receive funding from the WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) to deliver a 3-year pilot program Phoenix had developed and known as the Trauma Transformation Initiative. This was a holistic psychoeducation group program and over the course of those 3 years achieved very successful outcomes for the participants.

2020 brought the Covid-19 global pandemic, and a further shadow being cast by the knowledge funding for Phoenix from the WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) would not be extended as it was considered by the Federal

Government that the treatment of complex trauma was a State Government responsibility. In addition, funding from the Department of Communities was to be extended only for another 12 months yet again, and for the fourth time. With notice only received from the Department at the end of the financial year regarding contract extensions, Phoenix during this period endured a large turnover of staff each year. Although employees wished to remain with Phoenix, they needed security of tenure and were unable to wait for the Department's decision. It was challenging for Phoenix to have this ongoing loss of skill and expertise, and loss of investment in the professional development of staff. The impact of this for the clients was even more significant as they had to begin counselling again with new counsellors when often they were only just starting to feel safe enough with their previous counsellor to begin their trauma work.

There was however a silver lining in the time of Covid-19 lockdowns in that this provided Phoenix with the opportunity to develop new and effective E-Services for clients via either video conference or phone. This has meant greater flexibility and accessibility to the services and support available. The Phoenix team worked hard to ensure these E-Services were underpinned by an evidence base and sound policies and procedures to maximise safety and effectiveness. Research was undertaken to see if the specialist and holistic approaches to trauma recovery offered by Phoenix, such as for example EMDR, psychoeducation, yoga, and nutrition workshops on the mind gut connection, could continue to be offered online and to our delight we discovered these could be delivered 'virtually' and remain effective.

Staff and most Phoenix clients were quick to adapt to the COVID-19 restrictions and embrace the new ways of working. Phoenix implemented a COVID-19 Safety Plan for those clients wishing to return to in-person counselling sessions. However, most clients, having valued their online experience, opted to continue receiving counselling via the new E-Services. The offshoot of the E-Services was that clients could undertake their trauma work and healing and recovery journey in the safety of their own home, they saved significant time by not needing to travel to their appointments or have the added expense of fuel, parking or childcare.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions Phoenix was not able to deliver all the workshops and courses planned for the Trauma Transformation Program and this led to an underspend. Following discussions with WAPHA it was agreed the unspent funds could be used to upgrade our data-base and records management system. At that point in time, Phoenix did not have the ability to provide staff with reliable remote access. The assistance from WAPHA meant that Phoenix could move all data and records from an onsite server to the iCloud. This was a game changer for Phoenix and future proofed the organisation.

With Award wages for employees increasing significantly and funding levels remaining mostly static, Phoenix eventually had to reduce operations to 3 days per week to remain viable and effective. Phoenix also needed to find creative and innovative ways to support sustainability and capacity building.



To assist Phoenix with our ongoing sustainability challenges a new fee-for-service business arm **Phoenix Professional Development and Prevention Services** was established. Phoenix was thrilled to be informed in June 2021 that a Lotterywest Grant

application had been successful. The Lotterywest Grant provided seed funding for the first 12-months and that supported the development of curriculum materials and the marketing of these new services with the support of a Project Manager position.

In October 2020 Phoenix hosted a networking event prior to the 2020 Annual General Meeting. This event also provided an opportunity to formally acknowledge the contribution of Phoenix Office Manager Lois Lloyd who retired from Phoenix after 34 years of service to the organisation. Lois was awarded an Appreciation Certificate presented by Simon Millman MLA and Phoenix Chair Julie Woodhouse.



In 2022 Phoenix CEO Louise Lamont, Chief Executive Officer was appointed to the **National Strategy Advisory Group - for the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse**.

The inaugural Phoenix **Creating Compassionate Communities Conference** was held in October 2022. More than 200 in-person and virtual registrations were received with delegates roles encompassing a diverse range of professions. The highly successful Conference fostered networking across the sector and provided delegates with important information on early intervention to prevent child sexual abuse and childhood trauma.

In 2023, the Phoenix Board made the decision to sell the Coolbinia property that Phoenix had operated from since 2012. As much of the client work was now being delivered via the E-Services it was felt in the short-term Phoenix could effectively operate from City West Lotteries House, in Delhi Street West Perth and so a space was rented, and the Phoenix office was relocated there in June 2023. This also meant that the fee-for-service business arm **Phoenix Professional Development and Prevention Services** would have access to the training room facilities onsite at City West Lotteries House. Later in 2023 Phoenix was delighted to be appointed by the sector to provide Secretariat Support to the 10 other Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services (CSATS) and Indigenous Healing Services (IHS) across the State and Phoenix also hosted a launch of Minimum Practice Standards.

Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service remains one of very few organisations in WA specialising in child sexual abuse counselling and support for adult survivors. Not only does Phoenix support those directly impacted by child sexual abuse, but also family members, significant others and communities impacted by disclosures of child sexual abuse.

Phoenix clients over the years have ranged in age from 5 years old to 91 years of age, which is indicative of no one being too young or too old to receive support. However, this is also indicative of tragically how early in life therapeutic treatments begin, along with how long and lasting the devastating impacts of child sexual abuse can be.

The road to recovery can remain a lifelong journey.

Phoenix clients often return to the service months or years after they have taken a break from their recovery journey and when further support is required due to trauma resurfacing as a result of a life event such as the birth of a child, or the death of their perpetrator.

What continues to set Phoenix apart from many mainstream organisations, particularly those using a medical model, is that Phoenix is responsive to client needs firstly by not being time-limited in terms of the number of sessions provided, or in terms of the length of time a client is accessing the service. This approach also acknowledges that it can take longer to build a trusting therapeutic alliance when a client has experienced trauma through the violation of trust, along with societal boundaries being disregarded for the purpose of exploiting a child.

Phoenix's therapeutic treatment approaches are flexible and draw on a range of modalities to facilitate appropriate responses to the individual needs of each client, and to build some psychological resilience and develop a resource and support base for the client before embarking on complex trauma and processing work. Phoenix draws on a phased and tiered treatment approach to establish safety and stability first. All clinical work is underpinned by the minimum standards of trauma informed practice principles and guidelines regardless of the therapeutic interventions or modalities applied.

The organisation is governed by more than 60 policies due to the complex nature of the work. All clinical and administrative processes are recorded in detailed manuals to ensure corporate knowledge is not lost when members of staff retire or move on.

Over the decades, Phoenix has expanded its services to include sector advocacy, training and education, and prevention services. Innovative and evidence based effective treatment practices such as trauma sensitive yoga, mindfulness, expressive therapies, self-care strategies and nutrition webinars have also been introduced. For more than 40 years now, Phoenix has made a significant contribution to the West Australian community in terms of supporting the healing and recovery of those impacted by child sexual abuse and raising awareness of the scale of the problem and its impact.

## Key Milestones

- 1978** 24 Hour phone-in resulted in volunteer service for those who have suffered sexual abuse
- 1984** ISA incorporated as the first NGO in WA to deal specifically with child sexual abuse
- 1986** Partial funding from the WA Government – Service professionalised with paid staff
- 2012** Purchased property in Coolbinia and moved operations to that building
- 2016** ISA was rebranded and became known as Phoenix Support & Advocacy Service Inc
- 2021** Fee-for-service business Phoenix Professional Development & Prevention Services launched
- 2022** Creating Compassionate Communities Conference held – Inaugural event
- 2023** Office relocation to City West Lotteries House, West Perth
- 2023** Phoenix appointed to Secretariat role for the sector delivering child sexual abuse services
- 2023** Phoenix hosted a Launch by Federal Attorney - General Mark Dreyfus of the National Minimum Practice Standards
- 2024** In our Secretariat role provided Roundtables for the sector with guest speaker Grace Tame
- 2024** 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Creating Compassionate Communities Conference – Ending the Blame Game Shame



## Current Staff & Board Members

2023-2024 - Phoenix Staff	Staff Position (all part-time)	Appointed
Louise Lamont	Chief Executive Officer	February 2015
Marc Spradbury	Accountant and Corporate Duties	January 2019
Kaye Doolan	Finance Officer	June 2016
Sally Woods	Senior Counsellor	July 2019
Baljit Carroll	Senior Counsellor	August 2020
Claudia Da Silva	Senior Counsellor	January 2022
Susan Laird	Senior Counsellor	August 2023
Jay Wright	Project Manager and Admin Assistant	September 2022

2023-2024 - Board Members	Board Position	Appointed
Julie Woodhouse	Chair	October 2014
Leanne Sultan	Deputy Chair and Secretary	October 2016
Amit Kabra	Treasurer	October 2018
Gavin Bagley	Board Member	October 2019
Monica Taylor	Board Member	October 2019
Peter Le	Board Member	October 2019

### FORMER BOARD MEMBERS

Leanne ALLISON	Ron MATHIESON
George CHERIAN	Frieda ORR
Peter CURRY	Anne PEKAAR
Andre de BARR	Heliyana PEREZA
Ann ELLIS-YOUNG	Jacqui JOSEPH-BOWEN
Estelle GON	Clare ROBBINS
Cathy GREGORY	Jasdev SINGH
Bianca HADZIC	Jonathan SMITH
Hoosein ISMAIL	Ali WHITE
Minji KIM	Rob WILTON
Angela LOXTON	Colette WRVNN

**THANK YOU TO ALL THE BOARD MEMBERS – PAST AND PRESENT FOR THEIR VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS.**

### DONORS & SPONSORS

Over the years, Phoenix has benefited from the generous support of the State and Federal Government, Lotterywest, WA Primary Health Alliance and many others acknowledged each year in our annual reports, and we are most grateful for this support.

## Trauma Transformation Program

In May and June 2023 Phoenix held another Trauma Transformation Program, our in-house co-designed holistic, psychoeducational mind-body awareness program specifically developed by Phoenix for adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

A group of courageous Phoenix clients attended the sessions for four hours over six consecutive weeks. The Program was facilitated by Trauma Counsellor Coby Greer, and Phoenix CEO, Louise Lamont. Group sessions included information on how trauma impacts the brain, the nervous system, and the ability to self-regulate.

In addition, the program included:

- Mindfulness and Meditation practice;
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga;
- Additional Self-Regulation activities; and
- Nutrition information on the mind-gut connection.

Phoenix was delighted that the women continued to meet regularly via their own informal peer support network they named the "Trauma Transformation Warriors" and many of them have contributed to this anniversary publication.

### Their reflections on the program included:

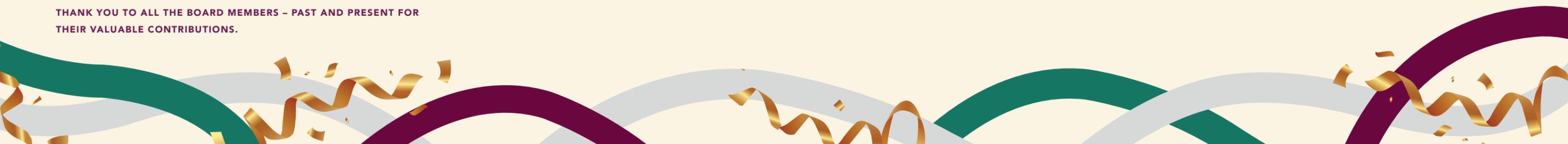
*"Human connection is powerful, enriching and meaningful. I am forever grateful for the 6 weeks you have given me to be able to connect with other "WARRIORS". One of the best experiences of my LIFE. You two ladies are our healing warriors".*

*"Dear Coby and Louise, These past weeks have been a gift. A gift in community, acceptance, knowledge, and curiosity. You have been amazing and empowering. Even though we have driven the cart off the tracks sometimes, you always brought us back. This time will always be appreciated."*

*"I felt I wasn't judged and could be myself and allow myself to speak freely about the impact of my trauma with people who understood the perspective, not gaslight or reduce it, it made me feel a sense of belonging."*

*"So meaningful, something I have been eagerly waiting for. From Day 1 a non-judgmental environment. I felt accepted, I felt that I belong, and I felt I mattered."*

*"It was helpful being with others who have experienced childhood trauma and learning from them and being understood and seen for who I am."*





# Nancy Rehfeldt

## COUNSELLOR AND ADVOCATE

**BORN:** CILFYNYDD, WALES, 1924

**DIED:** HILTON, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, AGED 94

This article is drawn from the obituary written by Nancy's daughter Liz Rehfeldt for the West Australian and published 29 May 2019.

Nancy Rehfeldt alerted society to the horrors of child sexual abuse in Australia when no-one else was brave enough to tackle the issue. She highlighted that abuse was not only committed by strangers but also family members, friends and people in authority such as priests and teachers.

With awareness of this issue even more acute today and with some recent high-profile cases in the public conscience, Nancy stands as a leading light in bringing the prevalence of child sexual abuse and the need for critical support into the open.

Born the youngest of a family of four children in Cilfynydd, Wales, Nancy was the youngest child of William and Winifred Lewis. Her father, like most men in their Welsh village was a coal miner and often had to work on his stomach or knees in dangerous and unhealthy conditions for appallingly low wages. Wanting to improve conditions for his fellow miners, her father became an active member of the then fledgling Labour Party. At night he read avidly about politics and philosophy and wrote speeches for his friend who became a parliamentarian.

An idealist at heart, his family unfortunately suffered, especially after the great strike of 1926, when he was branded a communist and troublemaker and subsequently found it difficult to get work. Nancy often told stories of not having enough food to eat except for bread and dripping, and never having enough money for clothing or shoes. It was not unusual, she said, to have one pair of Wellington boots a year which were later cut down into shoes for summer.

But Nancy's father instilled in his children the importance of social justice and looking after the underdog—a trait Nancy inherited in full. He also instilled in Nancy, and all his children, a life-long love of reading. It was reading that helped sustain her while she recovered from a series of life-threatening illnesses and operations during childhood and her teenage years.

She left school at 14 and took a variety of jobs as in retail and hospitality in Pontypridd, Wales and Trowbridge, Britain, to help support the family.

In 1946 Nancy met, fell in love and then married a German prisoner of war – Gunther Rehfeldt. This was not an easy course to take in post-war Britain and met with prejudice and judgment, but she was sure that her choice was a good one as Gunther was a wonderfully caring and supportive husband. They were married for 41 years until cancer claimed his life in 1988.

In 1966 Nancy and her family left Wales for a new life in Australia. Initially, the family moved to Whyalla in South Australia as '10-pound tourists' with assisted passage through BHP, and after two years moved west to Perth. Nancy and Gunther embraced their new life in Australia and were determined to make it work.

With a keen interest in politics, Nancy became involved in the Victoria Park Branch of the Australian Labor Party in the 1970s and was a delegate on the WA State Executive. She later stood as a candidate for the City of Perth council elections and by openly declaring her politics and Labor-party backing challenged the notion that party politics did not influence local government candidates.

In 1974, in the early days of the women's movement in Perth, Nancy started to get a niggling feeling that being a housewife and working in part-time jobs just wasn't enough for her. So in 1975 she began studying welfare

work and graduated with a Diploma in Health and Welfare. That same year, International Women's Year, she attended the five-day Women in Politics Conference in Canberra. That was an eye-opening experience and a turning point for Nancy. It was then she became a feminist.

She left the conference with a burning ambition to work for women. Shortly after she began work as a rape counsellor at a recently formed Women's Health Centre in North Perth. Realising that she had a limited knowledge of the issue of sexual assault, the law and legal practices – she began studying court lists and attending cases.

She watched defense lawyers attack the credibility of the witness (the victim). Intimate details of the woman's previous sexual history were laid bare, centre stage. Meanwhile, the accused was not obliged to undergo cross-examination, instead, he could make an unsworn statement from the dock. Nancy felt that this was so unfair.

She realised that there was limited community awareness of the victim's plight, no emergency services, no organised support or counselling for the victims of rape or other sexual crimes, and no advocacy to change rape laws.

In 1976, she became a founding member of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and began work there as a counsellor. In the same year, Australian Women Against Rape, or AWAR as it was known, became an incorporated organisation and as a founding member, she became its President.

In 1977, she started work as a counsellor at Women's Health Care House in West Perth, again as a founding member. One evening at an AWAR meeting, she received a phone call from an unknown woman who spoke bitterly about the fact that AWAR worked only for women and did nothing for children. That call stayed with her. Not long after, Nancy initiated with others a 24-hour phone-in to gauge the extent of the problem of sexual assault of women and children in Western Australia.

Calls came in from all over Western Australia and AWAR received considerable media coverage. A resulting report was sent to the Minister for Community Welfare to highlight the extent of the issue.

In 1978 Nancy was invited to become a member of the Advisory and Coordinating Committee on Child Abuse for the Department of Community Services. Over the next few years she was a guest lecturer at tertiary institutions, schools, hospitals, police in-service training and numerous community groups.

She was a regular interviewee on radio, television and in newspaper and contributed information and expertise to numerous research projects on the subject of child sexual abuse as well as being a speaker and delegate at family violence and sexual assault conferences in Canberra, Melbourne and Tasmania.

In 1984, Nancy established the Incest Survivors' Association, which is still in existence today but under the new name of Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service Inc. The organisation is a specialist service that provides counselling and support to the survivors of child sexual abuse.

In 1986 she presented at the 6th International Congress on Child Abuse in Sydney and was a member of the WA State Government's Task Force on Child Sexual Abuse.

Nancy's ground-breaking work led to changes to sexual assault laws, better services for abuse survivors and mandatory reporting of suspected child sexual abuse. She was recognised in 1986 with the awarding of an Australia Day honour that saw her inducted as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to welfare, particularly in relation to women and children.

In February 2013, Phoenix Support and Advocacy purchased premises with a Lotterywest grant and Nancy's foresight and years of dedicated, and often voluntary hard work, was recognised with the official opening and naming of Nancy Rehfeldt House. She was overwhelmed at the recognition and honour, and received a congratulatory letter from then Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who she admired greatly.

Nancy retired to care for her husband and after he died, she left public life completely to spend time with family and her beloved dogs. She died after a short illness and is survived by two daughters and two grandsons.

PHOTO OF ARTWORK BY EMMA © - A Phoenix Client who kindly donated this amazing painting to our organisation



## Experiencing Strength and Hope

BY CG ©

I am an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

I was groomed and sexually abused by my stepfather on a weekly and at times daily basis for 10 years of my childhood. It began when I was 2 and ended when I was 12 years old.

I disclosed and reported my abuse in my 30's which resulted in my perpetrator being charged with 24 offences. During the court process he was granted the reward of a plea deal which resulted in a guilty plea to 12 charges whilst the rest were dropped. He was then gifted a reduction in sentencing for his pleas of guilty, affording him the imprisonment service of 6 years and 3 months out of a 24-and-a half year sentence.

As a result of my childhood, I have experienced a lack of access to education, long term homelessness, substance addiction, FDV relationships, social isolation, complete separation from my family of origin, and a life of poverty.

By the time I arrived at Phoenix I was a shell of a person. I was existing, in a state of swinging between dissociated fear and panic, and vivid flashbacks every waking second. Nights were even worse. I would either be unable to sleep or I would experience rolling night terrors. I was unable to complete daily living tasks. I was unable to parent my children. I was unable to function in any capacity as a human being.

I have spent 3.5 years attending fortnightly counselling and EMDR sessions with Senior Counsellor Sally at Phoenix. As a result of the hard work, we have put in together I have been able to process a lot of my trauma. I have developed a healthy sense of self, I have strategies and skills to cope

with life, I have found connection in community, I have returned to education and will next year be attending University.



I have secured stable housing and meaningful paid employment, I have healthy relationships with others, I have peace and safety in my life, I can trust myself, my children get to have a whole and happy mother who functions, I am now remarried to a wonderful man who has also engaged with Phoenix in relation to his own experiences of being subjected to childhood sexual abuse. Phoenix has saved our lives and saved our family. Our lives today are filled with hope, promise and prosperity, something we never dreamed possible.



# Psychiatric Alphabet

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

I'd like to tell a little ditty, about the latest community  
That wants to share the alphabet with the LGBTIQ unity  
We are the psychiatric set the World would prefer to forget  
For we often reflect the trauma that haunts their realities.  
There is a neurotic in so many families.

We all have a story of how we grew up. The people, the  
places, the schools  
Behind closed doors, for better or worse, our dreams and  
fears all home grown.

Now rather than gender or sexuality the alphabet I quote  
is PD,  
Personality Disorders of which there is a few.

Let's start with the classic ABC

Cluster A includes the paranoid, the schizoid. You know,  
the full-on tripper.

The media would have you believe, I am the Yorkshire  
Ripper.

Cluster B are the bad asses, the ones that lose their shit.

The anti-social, the angry, the drama filled bitch.

BPD is the Borderline label.

If ya meet this girl, walk away while you're able.

Now I'm sure you've heard all about the narcissist.

No doubt they will tell you what they do best.

Cluster C's hide at home like rats in a trap

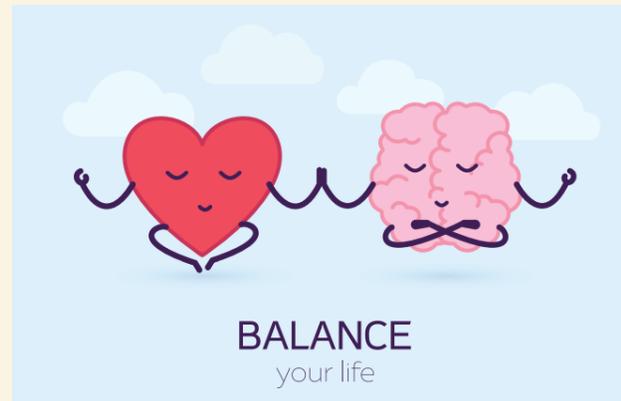
Relying on others to bring something back.

Co-dependency runs thick, still stuck with the fact

It's Me who must change, and that is that.

OCD lives closely here. Maybe if I cross my fingers and  
blink 3 times,

My fear might disappear.



Now all that is a lot. Ever wondered "What's the cause?"  
Some of it's in your genes. Part of the tribe and blood you  
grew up with

The rest is forged from trauma, abuse I had to put up with.  
It affects the actual brain structure. It's a child brain  
developmental picture.

These are the NDD's – neuro developmental disorders.

NT's are neuro-typicals with so-called 'normal' brains

ND's are neuro-divergent. The secret superheros, but still,  
you are suspicious.

Next, we introduce ADHD's, are you concentrating guys?

And the AS, Aspies, do you like the black and white?

Who are now with the ASD, Autism spectrum.

Not so bad you might think, that is unless you have them.

So what does all this BS mean? It means I'm quirky and  
funny.

I'm sensitive and smart. But I've lived with C.PTSD right  
from the very start.

The trauma, I'm told, is what makes me so. The horrors I  
lived as a kid.

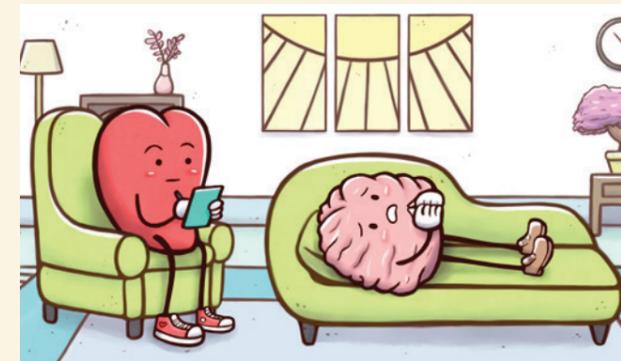
I've travelled the waves of the latest craze of the  
dissociative spectrum.

Now at the far end with 10/10 is what they call Dissociative  
Identity Disorder.

In old school terms its still quite rare, Multiple Personality  
Jekyll and Hyde? I'll let you decide.

But I think you will see more than 5 "parts" of Me that are  
on regular display.

All cogs in the wheel, all the emotions I feel when I think of  
the alphabet that describes Me.



Now the NT's (God bless their hearts) might think I'm  
having a whinge for attention

While my ND mates all carry the weight of always trying  
to fit in.

To mask, to mould, to mimic. Trying to follow the order.

I might be very different, but I am NOT the disorder.

I am a person with feelings. I am flesh and bone.

My heart it can be broken by your alphabet stones.

Personality disorders are as common as muck.

None of us perfect, we all get stuck.

So, if going shopping puts your head in a spin and the  
parking lot makes you break out in PTSD sweat.

Or if you're OCD about watching TV in you're favourite PJs  
with socks on your feet,

Don't let you're GAD stop your L I F E from being useful  
and constructive.

Go see a T (that's a therapist) and get a check-up on those  
cluster ABC's

The work you do is worth it. To find you are actually a  
person

And not a shitty alphabet.



*My family feels, coming to Phoenix, we find the staff very warm and trusting. We feel we are able to talk freely, say what we want and don't hold back. We had no one to turn to, in private, people would not understand or care. We were so desperate and in despair, family in shock.*

*Without Phoenix and the wonderful staff, my family would have fallen apart, and I (Father) would have looked for revenge.*

*Phoenix to us is a Godsend. They are very genuine people.*

*Thank you.*

Gerry G.

*Since attending Phoenix, I have felt supported and encouraged to share my experiences in a safe and secure environment. My journey has felt painful and traumatic. However, Phoenix has given me the support needed to cope with the journey to healing.*

*My Counsellor is professional, non-judgmental and gives me the freedom to explore my feelings and emotions in a safe and protected environment.*

*I am grateful to be able to access such a great service.*

AA.

# My Journey

BY DC ©

I was born to an illegal immigrant Mother, who was escaping domestic violence, in a Women's Refuge.

I was abused as a child by a Family Friend's parent from the ages of 7 till 12.

I was then abused by my stepfather from the ages of around 11 to 15 years of age, with the first incident and grooming beginning from the age of 5.

The first disclosure of the abuse happened during counselling at school. The second disclosure took place a year later during counselling with an Abuse Support Clinic. After the disclosures were made Police took statements, laid charges and both men were convicted and served time.

More trauma unfolded as a result of these events. Home life was awful. I never felt safe or supported.

My mother didn't believe me. She felt that I was responsible for breaking up a family, for my brothers not having a father and her having to endure financial hardships. Not only did I get no emotional support from her, she assisted my Stepfather's legal team with providing letters I had written in therapy about the abuse. I felt totally alone and responsible for dealing with the Public Prosecutor, Solicitors, Police and Legal Aid at aged 15.

The case with my stepfather became prominent in the media. Further complicating matters was that at the time the abuse from my stepfather had reached its height I had entered into a relationship with my visiting cousin. This was then used by the defense to slut shame me, discredit my allegations and argue that I was a sexualised girl who was capable of a consensual relationship with my stepfather.

I recall the Judge noting that this was the norm back in Ancient Roman times and he handed down a suspended sentence to my stepfather. It was only through media coverage and public outcry that my case was appealed and an increased sentence was handed down on appeal.

The Legal Defense and Judge's comments just reinforced my mothers' words that nothing bad happened and that I was to blame. It was only when people wrote in with letters to the newspaper detailing their disgust and saying that I should have been protected, that I started to think differently.

Their letters touched me in a way that I can't describe. I had experienced such a deficit emotionally throughout my life that the kind words from strangers hit me. At the time I didn't see that this should be the right and experience of every child - to be protected, defended and supported.

Unfortunately, because my stepfather's name was mentioned in the initial newspaper article, this then indicated me through association. This led to me being exposed in a way that I wasn't prepared for. My school friends didn't understand. The parents of my school friends from my private school formed judgements and some friends were told that they couldn't be my friend anymore.

The pressure was too much. I couldn't cope so I dropped out of school and moved out of home.

It was a long road in my journey before I acknowledged that I needed help.

I went on to live my life. I knew I had deep pain, that there were limits to my stress levels before becoming overwhelmed, that I'd have occasional bizarre reactions and outbursts. I managed this by isolating, escapism, with vices and through avoiding.



Eventually I found my way, well at least I thought. I put the past in a box and pretended everything was ok and nothing was wrong.

I pushed myself to pursue external ideas of success such as a career, a marriage and children. I thought if I could prove to the world that I was not "damaged", and that I was worthy, then all would be ok.

At times, major life events occurred, I struggled. I would hit rock bottom. I'd get surface level help, without facing underlying factors and then push on.

But It wasn't long before the wheels started to come off the cart.

Eventually, I found myself in a domestically abusive relationship. By then the years of repeated abuse, and masking, had worn me down. I had hit rock bottom hard this time and I was going downhill fast. This time with passengers.

The reality of my situation took ages to unpack and understand. I just kept thinking, how had this happened to me. Why is this happening to the perfect life that I had created? What happens when the perfect image is paired back to reality? What will people think of me? Why did I hide the truth from myself? Why does my brain operate in ways I don't even acknowledge or understand?

It was in the process of answering these questions that I was able to see where and how everything went wrong. I acknowledged my part in the situation. I confronted the reality.

I was repeating learned habits from childhood that were damaging to me long term and that I was vulnerable to repeated dysfunctional relationships until I sought help and changed.

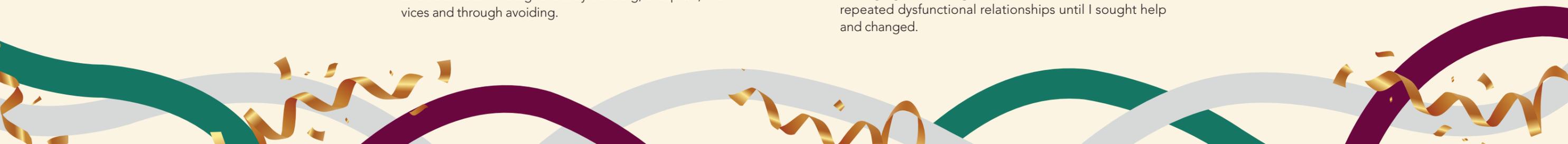
It was then that my journey began with **Phoenix**.

In my journey, I discovered that I have Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I found relief from painful memories with EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing) therapy. I received guidance and support from a specialised trauma counsellor. I received education on the impact of trauma on my brain and nervous system. I was taught personalised selfcare strategies to cope. I learned the importance of support networks and embraced fulfilling friendships with a community of survivors like me.

I am left now with a newfound sense of self agency, and a strong feeling of belonging within my Trauma Therapy 'Warrior Women' group.

What I have taken away from my experience so far is that change can happen when we reach out and then take the steps to commit to our journey.

The choices that you make each day to prioritise yourself is not a luxury but vital. **Because we as survivors are not alone, we are not helpless, and we are not worthless. We are warriors making change happen one step at a time.**





I cannot thank everyone enough at Phoenix. Marc and Kaye were always friendly, very approachable, and always willing to answer any question I had. My counsellor Sally was and is incredible. I cannot thank her enough. With her expertise, support, and wise words I have recovered from a break down and I am now me again. I will always be very grateful and thankful that I came across Phoenix counselling services. Thank you to all

Phoenix Client

I am truly thankful for the help, I had received. The staff, and my counsellor Claudia, were very helpful and very professional. I see no area that needs improvement. Thank you very much, truly appreciated.

Phoenix Client

I would just like to acknowledge that I have seen many counsellors and Sally has by far made the biggest and most valuable impression on my life. She was extremely professional while also displaying total compassion and care towards me. I have never felt more understood, heard or seen and I can say with 100% certainty that if it were not for Sally, I may have ended my life. Myself, and my family owe her a great debt. She showed me that life is worth living and that I matter as a human being.

Phoenix Client

A brilliant service, the inconspicuous house and the welcoming and community vibe was lovely. Especially when everyone associated with it has been injured when vulnerable.

Phoenix Client

# Door to Recovery

BY GEORGIA COLHOUN ©



## THE FRONT OF THE DOOR...

The top part of the front of the door represents me being in the shadows, on the peripheral, signifying the messaging that I have received my whole life:

- I am invisible*
- I am unimportant*
- I am worthless*
- I am worthless*
- I am insignificant*

The bottom of the door signifies my depression and anxiety, the rocks represent the heaviness I feel and how they roll around inside of me, I wake up everyday and I can feel them.

## THE REVERSE SIDE OF THE DOOR...

A mother should feel unconditional love towards her child; the inside of my door shows that I did not receive this, the infant and the mother are separate, there was no unconditional love in my story.



## WHEN THE DOOR IS OPEN...

The world that we live in is colorful, but my world is chaotic and scary, and I cannot step into that. When I think about my world and color I hear the lyrics to the song, "Flowers Are Red" is a song written and sung by Harry Chapin.

<https://youtu.be/7qrbNygLOYU>





I am so grateful that there are facilities like Phoenix available, to provide such an excellent service. I have found a safe environment in which to confront my problems.

My first encounter with my Counsellor, was positive and in the months of counselling sessions, she has continued to guide me in a manner that has given me understanding, new tools and a feeling of greater stability, confidence and hope for my future.

Thank you, Phoenix, and thank you to my Counsellor.

CS.

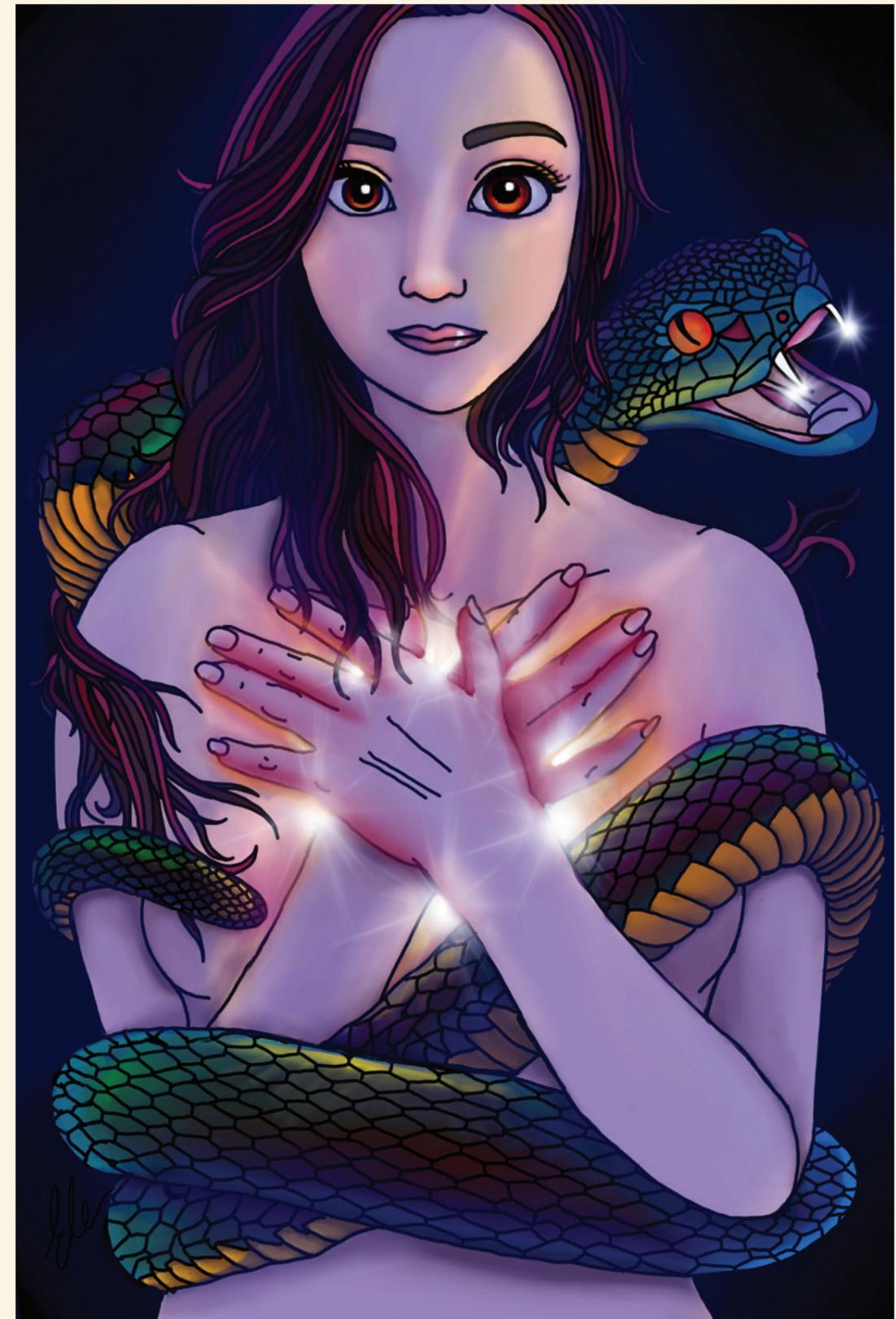
It has been a pleasure to work with the staff of Phoenix for the benefit of our mutual clients. My impression is that they are providing quality trauma informed psychotherapy, delivered within a framework that is respectful, compassionate and sensitive to client needs.

WA Mental Health Professional

Words cannot describe how I am so ever grateful and truly humbled. Taking those first few steps, as I entered the Phoenix building, body trembling with fear and uncertainty, dread in one hand and hope in the other. To my surprise a gentleman exited from behind the front counter, introduced himself, and greeted me with the warmest smile. He escorted me to the seating area, where he also took a seat, in our conversation, I was reassured with all the information I needed to know and each statement was fully explained, prior to signing. Then he excused himself, I was thankful, through this kind manner, I felt at ease and relaxed, prior to my first counselling session. The purpose of this feedback is to say there is no room for improvement, I felt the aim was not only welcoming, but to ease any anxiety, etc. (to catch ones breath) prior to each session.

Phoenix Client

#### ARTWORK BY EMMA ©



# Letter from a Survivor to her Mother

## LETTER FROM PHOENIX CLIENT (HISTORICAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVOR) TO HER MOTHER

This letter was shared with Phoenix by a client wishing for this to be shared for educational and advocacy purposes. The client viewed this as an opportunity to help other survivors and gave consent. \* Reproduced exactly as written in the client's own words and includes some commentary from Phoenix.

I had really really really really (I actually cannot say "really" enough here) REALLY hoped to just not have this conversation at all, hoping that it would come to its conclusion and demise when we get to court and you'll finally learn about all the things I never wanted my mum to know her brother did to me and the disgusting, shameful, unspeakable things I did to him. But I know this is never going to go away. I know you will never let it because you are my mum. So here is the best part of the full truth. **My truth. The client has finally found her voice and feels ready to speak her truth. A very courageous step after sitting with the unthinkable for 18 years (This supports the Royal Commission research that it takes on average 22 years to disclose child sexual abuse). The client also wanted to seek justice and had finally reported to Police, and charges were laid.**

It's been such a painful and emotionally testing past few months for me. I have made so much progress in terms of how I perceive the family and you specifically (and frankly am very proud of myself for being stronger than I ever thought possible), and although, if I'm honest, I don't know if our relationship will ever be what it was before April and whether I ever even want it to be again, I for the most part had come full circle and was doing really well until our Christmas dinner. I thought you were done with blurting such bizarre, impulsive, completely insensitive comments, the likes of which have already caused me so much hurt this year. **Disclosures are**

**extremely confronting for families and the reactions vary, but often reflect the stages of grief. Frequently family members do not know how to respond to the survivor, and emotions are heightened with reactivity driven by fear, anger, hurt, sadness, shame, and guilt.**

Even if I don't want to, I will always love you because you are my mum. But you have hardly been the mother, the relative, or even just the friend I have so desperately needed this year, and I have found myself turning to absolutely anyone and everyone, both except for and because of you. After **18 years** of holding onto **my secret** I wasn't suddenly crumbling. I wasn't suddenly unravelling. I was always the strong woman you had raised me and taught me to be!

What was hurting me so much was purely the thought of having to tell you that your brother is worse than all evil things I could think of. And that I knew this, as his victim. How was I ever supposed to be the one to have to hurt you so much by telling you this? The thought was crippling. It made me nervous, it made me anxious, it made me incredibly upset. I would honestly almost have rather suffered another 6 years at his hands than cause you the pain I knew (or thought) telling you would bring. **A child believes sexual abuse is their fault as they are groomed by the offender to believe this, or fear is instilled if 'they tell' about others being harmed or being abandoned by other family members who they are attached to or feel safer with.**

But after 18 years I knew it had to be the time to come clean. I knew it was what you would want from me. So I did. And as we lay on my bed, and I cried so much I couldn't even speak, and eventually you could piece together what had happened, I was met with the one and only answer that in 18 years of imagining what you would say, I had never even in my wildest dreams contemplated as a response: **"I know". This**

**unfortunately is not uncommon. Family members will go into denial or minimise the impact of the abuse. If the child is young, they falsely believe they will forget about it or will recover easily. They will avoid exposing what is happening for fear of bringing shame on the family or fear the consequences for everyone if the abuse is reported.**

I will never forget those words coming out of your mouth. It felt like poison. **This is experienced as a double betrayal and the person feels they were sacrificed for the protection of the family rather than protecting them as the victim.**

How could you know what I am trying to tell you in a moment when I can't even bring myself together to utter a proper sentence? How could you possibly know? The question rang through my mind over and over and over until you told me about **the day you walked in on him with me when I was 5. Imagine the outcome for this person if her family were able to take appropriate action, sought help and ensured she as the victim received therapeutic support and treatment before the trauma impacted her development and wellbeing long-term. Imagine her potential not being damaged, not losing years trying to manage trauma systems and imagine the cost savings to her and the community because she did not need to access services in adulthood as the road to healing and recovery takes so much longer when the damage is well entrenched in the nervous system.**

You gave me some sob-story of what happened, and how he cried when you confronted him, but as you spoke, all that I could understand was that you saw your brother doing something incredibly unspeakable, he told you he **"would never do it again", The victim and the family had been groomed and these were the empty promises that so many offenders make and uninformed adults believe.** and without much more thought you chose to believe him. And in doing so, holy shit you let me down.

As your daughter, I have never in 23 years been so f... ing disappointed of you. And to be quite blunt, not just of you, but to be your daughter. I was, and will be until the day I day, completely disgusted in the choice you made that day. **You didn't report him to authorities, you didn't warn your sister to be careful for her daughter, you did nothing. Families often find it**

**difficult to believe that another family member is not who they think they are, particularly when what has taken place has not been part of their experience. As a result, they will minimise and justify and unfortunately are inclined to blame the victim. The offenders are not 'one dimensional monsters' and often live quite 'normal' lives and the people that experience them in that 'normality' cannot equate, comprehend, or associate them with their offending behaviour, and tend to dismiss and not believe the alleged behaviour took place however, in this case it was witnessed and still dismissed and ignored, like somehow it would magically go away because he said he "would never do it again".**

Assuming, as you STILL do, that you "doubt" he would do anything. You could not have been more wrong. What you saw that day, and apparently considered to be mild, resulted in another 5 years of unspeakable abuse that no person on this Earth deserves. But that's okay right, because as you've now said to both me and my sister several times "at least he didn't penetrate you". **Some pathetic attempt to mild-down what he did. More minimisation, excuses, and justifications.** Well mum, that's because I was younger than 11, meaning that I hadn't hit puberty or fully developed and as a result my frame was too small, thus in his attempts he was unsuccessful. Does that count? **It's only ATTEMPTED child rape right? People are inclined to make judgements about the impact of child sexual abuse according to their own belief framework and opinions. The trauma impact is unique to the individual, as there are so many contextual and environmental factors that contribute to the severity of the impact. The healing and recovery process focuses on those impacts and does not measure these by 'the story', but rather by the presenting trauma symptoms and how these are impacting an individual's quality of life, wellbeing, and ability to function day to day and enjoy life. The impact cannot be measured by the details of the story alone, ultimately it is how the trauma affects the individual and some survivors for many reasons may have more resilience, or a better support system than others.**

Jesus Christ, how could you even utter those words like somehow anything (EVERYTHING) else he did to me was okay. All the while, saying how "shocked" you are, and that you "just can't believe you didn't know

and you didn't see it". Let me tell you something; after walking in on him WHEN I WAS FIVE, it should not be so surprising. ANYBODY else would have seen it. **Apparently (as you told me) even your sister, who warned her own daughter to be careful of him.** Meanwhile, you saw what you saw, and only once did you come to ask me if your brother had ever done anything to me. I was probably 5 or 6 but I remember it like it was yesterday, standing in your room in our first house. **You asked, and afraid of the consequences, I said no. Adults assume if they ask a direct question, and the child responds by saying no or avoiding answering that everything is okay. There is little insight that the child through the grooming process may be terrified of the consequences of revealing "the secret".** and you apparently never felt the need to persist in asking again. **The adults often make the disclosure all about themselves and are also trying to avoid the consequences of an actual disclosure and are often relieved to be able to avoid dealing with it and convince themselves it will all go away, which it may initially short term until later when it will manifest in trauma behaviours and symptoms. There is so little thought given to the consequences for the victim, which in many cases without treatment is lost potential, and a lifetime sentence of complex trauma.** I'm sure I would have remembered, because it would have finally felt like SOMEBODY would had given me a voice that I so desperately needed in a situation so impossibly delicate, that I had completely lost mine.

What's even worse for me, is that the only course of action you took was to tell Granny, who apparently, just like you, thought it was not worth fussing over, and that it would be totally fine to leave him with me on quite literally thousands of separate occasions. She walked in on me several times, lying on his lap getting "back tickles" and knowing what she knew, apparently thought that was fine. **Examples here of collusion by family members with the offender and protecting an adult over the safety and wellbeing of a child.**

I am just so utterly shocked at the both of you. The amount you have let me down, as my family, is just incomprehensible. And frankly, your attitude to all of this since the day I told you, and the way you spoke to me those first few months is beyond any amount of repair that you could ever do. They ring through my head every single day like a broken record and yet you probably don't even remember saying them. But I have never forgotten.

"At least he didn't touch you."

"You know he'll go to jail don't you? They'll probably beat him to death in there. And you're okay with that?"

"I really don't think you should tell them our distant relatives. They're his only friends! Just let him have 1 or 2 friends!"

"It's not like he has access to children"

"You're an ungrateful little bitch" – an absolute favourite of mine. You stormed out my room as I was packing my bags to move out of the house because I finally decided to stand up for myself. **Victim blaming, denial, minimisation, justification, making the victim responsible to not "bring shame on the family", very little focus on the offender or interest in him being held accountable, or protecting other potential victims from his offending. The offender instead is portrayed as the victim.**

But don't you worry, as I discovered living in the house those few months after I told you, whether you knew it or not, your husband certainly had your back over mine. On one occasion after we had a tiff about your brother, and you had said (as you felt the need to every time the conversation came up) one of the above mentioned quotes, like so many other times I had no idea what to say to you. So I shut off and stopped talking to you. You left to go and cry in your room, and your husband took that as a fantastic moment to pull me aside and tell me to be more "considerate" of your feelings because I was being a "little bitch". You can imagine when I have never felt quite so alone in this world, that one REALLY hit home. Oh and then there was also another occasion where he actually messaged me to give me some sob story about how the "daughter she loves is not treating her (you) right". I mean for gods sake. Even after he's been in my life for nearly 18 years, treating him like my own father, **you both got so wrapped up in your own little worlds and emotions you forgot all about mine and doing what a parent is supposed to do: put their child's emotions first.** Never mind that I have never in my life dealt with anything this big and I actually have no idea how to cope with it. **Further betrayal of trust by family members of the victim and failing to provide emotional safety and support. Caught in their own emotions. Working with the family when a disclosure has taken place is also an important aspect of this work for healing and recovery.**

The constant back and fourth between your disgustingly filthy comments and this constant "we love you. We support you. We would do anything for you" mentality has completely f...ed me up. So when I say things like "I don't trust you", I am not sorry. You have given me absolutely no reason to trust you these past few months. You have told me over and over again that you support me and you are on my side but your actions have not in the slightest reflected that. And what's so incredibly confusing and annoying about this whole thing is that you both genuinely believe you have done nothing wrong in the slightest. You in fact have even said to me "I'm innocent". **No acknowledgement that the victim was an "innocent" child. The mixed messages of rejection and support are confusing and add an additional burden for the victim.** Mum, never mind not being involved in the problem, you, your husband, granny and your sister (who I will honestly never forgive for inviting your brother over for what you so pathetically called a – and I quote – "last hoorah" dinner for him because I was "probably going to send him to jail" and they would "never see him again") ARE the problem. I have dealt with this entire situation alone for 18 years. Do you actually think I just suddenly can't cope with it? As big a deal as it is, I am stronger than that. Our relationship has been in jeopardy purely because of the actions that you have taken from the time I was 5, right up to this year and all the insane decisions you have made in my journey of coming out to you. You and your reactions are also the sole reason that I am visiting my psychologist.

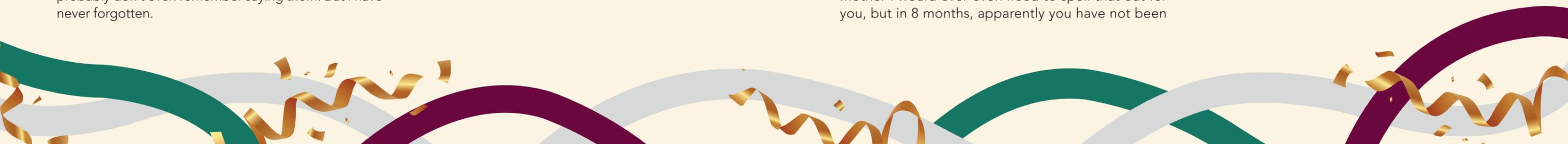
You have told me time and time again how much you and your husband are hurting. Did you ever for even a second actually stop and think about how much pain I was in? To be abused is one thing, but to not have the support of your mother is another. You can tell me that you supported me and that you still do, but if you could even CONTEMPLATE saying those disgusting things (and let me assure you there are MANY more incredibly hurtful things that you have said that I have simply decided not to include above), then you are not on my side. You may not be on "his side", but you have not been shy to make it seem as though you are sitting on the fence. And to me, loud as day, that IS a side. And it is not mine. **Survivors so often feel abandoned by their loved ones and families and not heard.**

It is so incredibly disheartening to me, that as my mother I would ever even need to spell that out for you, but in 8 months, apparently you have not been

able to piece that together yourself. Apparently, you really do actually need to be hand-held through where and how you went wrong. Like you deserve some kind of explanation and you want to drag me down to be the person to do it. You have taught me strength since birth and yet you (and your side of the family) are the ones who have made me feel weak. Helpless. Alone.

I have been so worried about everyone except myself through this, and now it is time to finally put myself first. **To survive, a victim of child sexual abuse often becomes hypervigilant as a way of trying to stay safe. They are always trying 'to read the room', so to speak. This can lead to the child becoming tuned into the emotions of the adults however, often at the cost of losing touch with their own feelings and needs. They are often taking care of the emotions and needs of the adults at the expense of their own.** I don't care if coming out about it tarnishes our family name. I don't care what happens to your brother going forward. I don't care if your sister loses 1 or 2 of the 3 friends she has just because word of this has gotten out and she won't get off her lazy arse to meet more people and make more friends. And I don't for a second think that you are "judging me", nor would I care if you were. There are so much bigger things in life. These are small, pathetic things and I refuse to donate them a second more of my time or mental capacity.

It has taken me far too long to actually stand on my own 2 feet about this whole topic. I'm embarrassed of myself that I couldn't hold my own and stand up to you for myself and all the other abused who are made to feel even for a millisecond as though they are alone. They deserve better. I deserve better. Which is why for my own mental health I have tried to break away from you. Space. Permanent space. Not booting you out of my life, not never calling you, not ignoring birthdays and events. Just space. Like a smashed vase, I feel like I have been picked up and thrown down onto the floor over and over again. Moving out of your house and into my own was the best thing I ever did for myself next to seeing a psychologist, and through both of those things I have finally managed to start piecing back together the hundreds of pieces that I am in, to try to get back to my original state – One I happened to very much like.



There is no guideline to how this works. And god knows this is such a ridiculous situation that I don't know anybody who has even been in a similar situation, so it's hard to get advice on. I really just want to do this at the pace that I am comfortable with. It's okay that you have been persistent in contacting me; amid this mess it is a nice reminder that you do love me and want to get back to where we were. But I can wholeheartedly say that being through what we have, right now (and maybe not ever, I don't know) I don't think we will (or even really know that I want to) have the same dynamic of relationship that we did before April when this whole mess began. I have grown and I am still learning, but I like the feeling of independence it brings. I like to know that I can do life on my own and I don't need others. I actually can stand on my own 2 feet, and more than that I can walk and jump and run. And going forward, you need to be okay with that, and you need to be okay with the space that I need and this new relationship that we now have, because we are here from your own actions. You make your bed, you sleep in it.

You're my mum, so I will always love you. I will always want you at my wedding, I will always want you in my future kids lives. **This is reflective of the pain of feeling abandoned by the very person the survivor believed would protect them. They are overwhelmed by the confusion of deeply loving a parent who has let them down when they most needed them to protect and keep them safe. This same confusion is even more extreme when the actual offender is a parent or significant other.** But it needs to happen at my pace. What has been done can't ever be undone. It will always pull at my heart strings and it will always be in the back of my memory, but I am working on making them smaller. Please allow me the time and the space for that.

Love you forever, Phoenix Client (client name removed)

### LETTER FROM CLIENT TO PHOENIX COUNSELLOR

Writing it (the letter above) would never have even been an option before meeting you and going on this whole journey with you. You brought me so much comfort just in having you in my corner and on my team - You were my lighthouse guiding the way for me in a time I was completely lost in darkness.

Please let me know if there is absolutely anything I can do for you! If, for example, I can write a letter to your sponsors giving them a personal account of your unprecedented worth it would be my absolute pleasure. I could never in a thousand lifetimes repay you for the happiness, courage, and self-worth you have provided me.

Thank you again, ten thousand times over.

You are, genuinely, my hero.

All my thanks,  
Phoenix Client (client name removed)

### QUOTE FROM CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST WHO WISHED TO ADVOCATE FOR PHOENIX

*I am a Clinical Psychologist with 15-years' experience in private practice. I previously held the position of Clinical Psychologist Specialist with the Department of Health, and have worked in various mental health services, including community mental health clinics and inpatient psychiatric units. Much of my work has been with clients with mental health issues arising from childhood trauma.*

*Phoenix provides counselling for clients with both current and historical sexual abuse in childhood. This service is unique, in that it provides low cost, trauma informed therapy of sufficient duration to adequately meet the needs of clients with complex trauma. Research evidence shows that effective treatment for this group needs to be of medium- term duration (one to two years).*

*These clients have difficulty accessing public mental health services, and if they do, the mandate of these services is to treat mental health symptoms, rather than provide therapy for the trauma that underpins their mental health difficulties. The process of healing requires attention to both mental health symptoms and the broader aspects of trauma.*

*The clients I have referred to Phoenix have had excellent outcomes, both in terms of increased function (e.g., return to paid employment) and decreased mental health symptoms, including decreased suicidality.*

## So Far From "Normal"

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

I'm so far from "normal",  
I dream of things I will never have  
Happy family dinners  
Long gone. It's very sad.

No parents to support Me  
No children here to love  
Even friends are wary  
Of letting me into their lives.

I'm classified as toxic  
I cannot hide my pain  
No matter how much I modify  
I'm left alone again

I work so hard to recognise  
The nasty things I do  
I keep turning up for therapy  
But still my world is blue.

I have a brain disorder  
I medicate to keep the peace  
I do everything I can  
To try and find relief.

See me walking down the street  
My disability is hidden  
But as soon as I open up my mouth  
You can tell I'm damage ridden

No hope of being "normal"  
No matter how hard I try

The ache of things I'll never have  
Makes me break down and cry

How do I learn to accept  
The life that I've been given  
When all the World looks at me  
As if I am a demon.

It's not my fault what happened to me  
The legacy is harsh  
I try to be kind to myself  
But my happiness never lasts

I am so far from "normal"  
I try so hard to fit in  
Perhaps the World could give me grace  
If they only knew where I have been

When I share my trauma  
Folks are horrified  
I'm supposed to keep that stuff to myself  
The shame I'm supposed to hide.

I'm sorry that I scare you  
I leave to keep you safe  
I walk alone, no hand to hold  
While tears roll down my face

I am so far from "normal"  
Why is it so hard to understand  
That because I'm different  
I still need a helping hand

# A Princesses One Wish

BY L HARVEY ©



Once Upon a Time there lived a lovely and sweet young princess. The Princess lived on an exquisite tropical island with her family. Surrounded by a lush tropical forest, full of magical plants and the precious blue flowers.

Princess Lisa wore a beautiful turquoise dress with sparkling blue flower crystals sewn into the dress. The Princess believed her dress was magical and it brought her love and comfort. Her glittering dress was stunning, and the fabric protected her small vulnerable body. It comforted the Princess and loved her dearly when no one else would.

The islands forest was where she would run too, stroking the leaves and petals on all the gorgeous tropical trees and flowers. It was her magical home where she felt safe and welcomed. Away from her family where she felt unloved and invisible. The forest knew Princess Lisa was worthy of love and happiness. It cradled her in a way she always wished her mother would have.

The plants listened to Princess Lisa's soft and sweet voice, hearing every word she spoke or sung. The magical forest always knew how to make her feel better and always knew when she was sad. If only her mummy could see her suffering too. Princess Lisa had tried to whisper her words to her mummy, but she couldn't speak as her family had stolen a little girls voice and rights.

One day, on a bright sunny morning, Princess Lisa was out for her daily walk through her forest home. She came across a little cute tiger cub that was being preyed on from the bigger animals. Then the cubs mother showed up and let out a great big ROAR. It scared and chased the big scary animals away. The Princess wished her mummy was there to protect her from the big scary adult abusing her. The tiger cub was so scared, but its mother

cuddled her cub, letting it know it was loved and safe. Princess Lisa cried and wished every day and night that her mummy could see how frightened she was. To be held and comforted and saved from her abuser. The Princess dreamed of what it would be like to feel loved and safe. Hoping her fairy tale would have a happy ending.

Princess Lisa loved to create her own little house within the forest from the fallen tree branches and leaves. Ultimately creating her happy loving home, making mud pies and beautiful masterpieces out of flowers. As, in her real home, Princess Lisa felt so unhappy, scared, and lonely. When she brushed her teeth and looked in the mirror every night, her face reminded her of the dead flowers in the forest. They were lifeless and empty. Her mummy ignored her sadness and all the little girl wanted most in the world was to be held by her mummy, to be told it was going to be okay sweetie. For her mummy to take her child's hand and save her from the big bad monster. Princess Lisa often cried herself to sleep, wishing and hoping her mummy would hear her cries.

The forest's lush tropical trees were so green and tall. During Princess Lisa's walks she loved to be with the monkeys in the trees, they were so funny. The Princess loved to climb right up to the top of the trees, reaching the sky. She felt on top of the world and a sense of peace, she felt magical. The monkeys swung from tree to tree, they would make funny monkey sounds, making her giggle away. She didn't get to laugh very much. There was a sweet baby monkey that reminded her of herself. The cheeky monkey was always getting into trouble with their daddy. The mummy and daddy monkeys would be angry and throw bananas at each other, the daddy monkey was very mean to the mummy monkey. Princess Lisa's daddy was also very mean to her mummy, he would sometimes scream and yell at the top of his voice to her and princess Lisa and her brother. The princess would always be crying

or screaming and sometimes interfering with what was happening. Her older brother would just sit there, so carefree, she didn't understand how he could do this. There was one night in particular that was really scary, she thought that daddy was going to really hurt mummy or her really badly. So, Princess Lisa put on her magical dress to protect herself. The next morning her parents were acting like a normal mummy and daddy again. No one ever got to talk about their feelings or to each other about what had happened. Our family problems were just pushed aside, her feelings were not important. Princess Lisa felt really lonely, her mummy didn't care about her, and the princess was terrified of her daddy.

Princess Lisa's most favourite part of her tropical island was the beautiful blue crystal lake that ran throughout the forest. The water was so clear and dreamy, filled with lots of little blue starfish and seahorses, these little creatures were so friendly, and they became friends instantly with the Princess. In the heart of the lake there was a waterfall that she loved to splash and hide under, her own water paradise. A secret hideout where she got to dream and create her own happiness. The Princess was mesmerised by the way the blue water felt on her skin, nourishing her body and mind. Her funniest part was to jump off the waterfall down into the lake. Pretending she was a mermaid with a turquoise tail with blue flowers on it. Princess Lisa loved going underwater, making bubbles with her mouth and sometimes her bottom too. When the Princess was deep under water, it was the most blissful feeling that she had ever experienced. It was quiet, she felt completely free from her life, the most magical loving feeling ever. Escaping away from her monster grandfather, emotionless mummy, and scary daddy. In that moment of being underwater, she imagined herself swimming away with the mermaids. Princess Lisa felt no worth for herself in her real life, used and abused, the forest was the only thing that loved and cared for her. A child that wasn't allowed to feel, express emotions and be a kid. She was treated and raised like an object. She needed a new life and a new fairy tale.

Princess Lisa had woken up with the biggest smile on her face for the 1st time, as this particular day was an extra special day. She was getting ready for the special event, wearing her dress with a blue crystal crown for her special day. She was ready and headed out for her walk, through her home of beauty, picking lots of blue flowers on her way.

Reaching the waterfall, she started to tie rocks to her body, using string and threading it around her small body. Filling the inside of her dress with blue flowers, comforting her, giving her love and strength for what a little girl was about to do. The rocks were so heavy on her little body, she was barely able to move, it was time. She shuffled to the edge of the waterfall. Beautiful, young Princess Lisa wasn't good enough for her mummy to love and comfort her, not worthy of love and happiness. The little girl took one last look at her paradise home, smiling, she gracefully leapt down into the lake. Sinking down to the bottom, seahorses and starfishes greeted her. Her crystals made the water sparkle as she took her last breaths as Princess Lisa. The Princess was drowning, she was uncomfortable, but she was finally FREE. The magical forest felt her love almost fully diminish; the forest was so angry it struck the island with an earthquake. The island was trembling with fear of losing such a loving Princess. The animals from the island came to the lake but it was too late.....she was loved.

A mysterious woman arrived at the lake, she was strong and brave. She pulled Princess Lisa out of the water, reviving her and saving her just in time. The woman was known as the Crystal Princess, she lived far away in the crystal forest. The crystal Princess felt Princess Lisa's love fading away. She rescued her, cradled, and comforted her, finally. The Crystal Princess became her mummy, she used her magic to banish little Lisa's family away to the dark forest, forever. Her new mummy was so caring, listening and hearing Princess Lisa's cries, ultimately becoming the mummy she had wished for in her fairy tale. Princess Lisa became known as the blue flower Princess, she had earned her title, and was worthy and lovable, her forest was her real home.

The blue flower Princess had befriended the most beautiful animal in her real forest home. A creature that had feathers that would expand into a gorgeous art masterpiece. The stunning blue peacock, a bird native to the island, and they were a symbol of strength, bravery, and worthiness. Their feathers were full of the precious blue crystals, and they would sparkle every time the peacock moved, creating a beautiful light show. The blue flower Princess created a new dress out of the peacock's feathers. A dress that symbolised that she was indeed worthy of love and happiness and that she was good enough.

The End...

# Statistically Condemned

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

There is a shit load of statistics  
That tell a story that is DARK  
Its been studied from Arsehole to Breakfast  
And still the Politicians ask

'How was your experience?  
What could have made it better?'  
And while I appreciate the chance to Voice  
MY History cannot be changed  
And time has not healed all wounds.

I am the Adult Child Sexual Abuse Survivor  
Statistically Condemned to live  
A tougher life than the majority.  
The fact that I have survived  
I have beaten many odds  
And more because of stubborn determination  
Than any traditional help I got.

Ya want to change the picture  
For little girls like Me?  
Then there needs to be more support  
For children still living in families.

Poverty is nothing new  
Child sexual servitude crosses many races  
And is happening right here, right now  
In every Suburban space.

We are encouraged to report  
But reporting is not enough



Chasing and convicting predators  
Has not helped my life much  
The root cause of my family hardship  
Was a "simple" broken home  
And a mother who traded my 'Innocence'  
For the 'Security' of the family as a whole.

With mixed roles of parent and work  
Mums choices where often limited  
Conflicting priorities often existed.  
The tougher it got, the greater the risk  
The kids got hurt.

Mandatory Reporters need more confidence in support  
That they won't be hung out to dry as whistleblowers  
When shit starts to fall apart.

Kids in Dysfunctional families  
Need different ways to connect  
Kids from Disadvantage  
Need different styles of education

Kids are still the Future  
Too many Kids are being left behind  
Enough with the  
"What do we do to fix it?"  
It's time to get it done.  
There is plenty of material out there  
On how to make things better  
What's missing is the motivation  
To prioritise Kids higher



I am a product of Modern Australian Society  
My Ugly Truth is the same ugly truth  
For a quarter of the kids you see  
In the playground today.  
That's the reality

If you want something different  
Do something different  
is what I've learnt in therapy.

Thank you for giving me the chance  
To speak up for kids like Me  
The job you have ahead  
Is complex as can be.  
Thank you for taking on the role  
Of speaking for Women and Kids  
In a what is still very much a Man's World  
Thank you for giving a place  
For my existential angst to be heard.

At 55 years of age  
I don't know if there's much  
For Me, that you can mend.  
But I do believe  
Abused kids like me deserve more  
than the life that I've lived  
As the statistically condemned

*I have been using the service for nearly three years.*

*I have found everybody I've been in contact with are very professional and compassionate.*

*I have come a long way since attending Phoenix and I know there is a long way to go. This counselling thing is extremely hard and I have been supported all the way.*

*Well done to clerical staff that are always pleasant and they always make you feel welcome and at ease.*

Phoenix Client

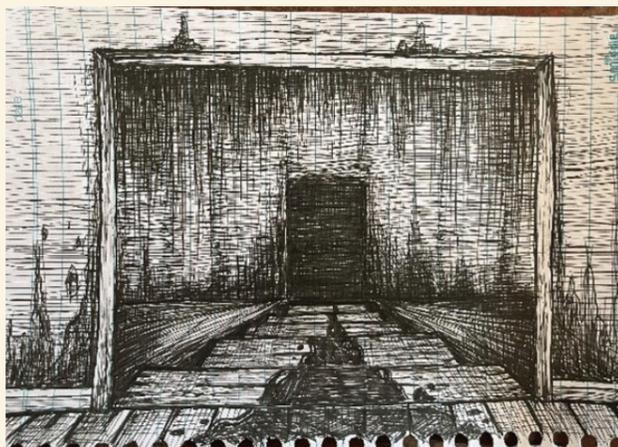
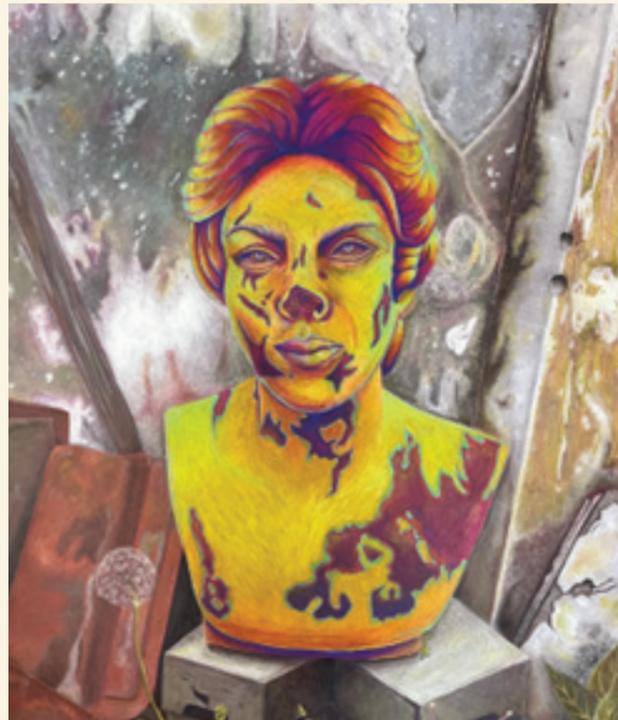
*Phoenix provides a safe haven for survivors. I have found my experience with Counsellors here to be light years ahead of what I have encountered elsewhere. I am so grateful to have the benefit of ongoing support in a caring, validating, non-judgmental environment and of their vast experience.*

*The whole set up of the centre and all people in it reflect this also.*

Phoenix Client

# Ashlee's Artwork

BY ASHLEE ©



# Wounded Warrior

BY L HARVEY ©

"I fight hard for the light of life"

The **dreaded darkness** creeps in,  
Sitting on the **edge of fight or flight**,  
A **common** and **continual** place,  
**Drowning** and **suffocating** from my **emotions**,  
**Battling** and **scratching** at the walls of my **mind**,  
I **fall**, I **run**, and I **rise** again.  
A **tormenting recurring** process.

I accept and I acknowledge I am a '**Wounded Warrior**' with **27 years** of '**battle scars**'. Sadly, **wounded** by my **own family**, it's a daily **mental battle** as I **challenge** to **rewrite 27 years of lies** that my mind has been **conditioned** to accept. After several years of living in a **dissociative state** I am now very **aware** of what's happening in the **present**, being aware of my **emotions, feelings** and **behaviours**.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, AWARENESS** and **ACCEPTANCE**, the three A's are the start of your healing journey. You cannot try to move on from trauma until you **ACKNOWLEDGE** it first, **VALIDATING** your **TRUTH** with **LOVE** and **COMPASSION**. Then being **AWARE** in the here and now, I grieve the loss of time and memories.

'**EXISTING ISNT LIVING**'. Most importantly **ACCEPTING** that you are a '**WOUNDED WARRIOR**'. **ACCEPTING** the brutal **PAINFUL** reality of your healing journey, it isn't easy or enjoyable.

**YOU** are **WORTHY** and as you emotionally **STAND UP** for yourself, you will truly **EMPOWER** your **SOUL** to courageously face your '**BATTLE WOUNDS**'.

E.M.D.R, and consistent trauma therapy work with a **compassionate** and **caring** counsellor is helping me **process** and **minimise** the **distress** of my trauma. Also finding true connections with other '**warriors**', brings **love** and **empowerment** to knowing you aren't **alone**. My biggest learning was finding my '**superpower**'. **Writing** is my way to express emotions and has opened up new **doorways** of my mind to actively **heal**.

"All '**WOUNDED WARRIORS**' deserve to have a **VOICE** and be **HEARD** and **YOU** are all **WORTH FIGHTING** for"



# A Survivor Story

## FROM A PHOENIX CLIENT

I am a child sexual abuse survivor and a client at Phoenix, and I have been supported to share my story of survival and journey towards healing.

Over the past few years, I have been doing a lot of inner work on myself, it started when I had many drug-induced psychotic episodes. During these episodes, it brought up a lot of suppressed childhood memories that I was not actively facing. I was raised in a very unsafe, violent, and turbulent environment. My father had an explosive and raging temper, he would emotionally, sexually, and physically abuse my mother - for as long as I could remember. I would always enjoy primary school because it meant not being at home - even if it meant enduring racial abuse.

The worst memories were the times when I witnessed my mother being taken to hospital. It was during the time I was around eight to nine years old, by then I had gotten use to the sounds of my parent's quarrels. I would lock myself in my room, disconnected emotionally. One night I heard the quarrels stop, my mother cry in pain and the night fell silent. I rushed out to the lounge room to find her slipping out of consciousness...thick blood oozing out of her neck and her body slipping off the couch...my father had thrown a plate through her head. In sheer horror...I was convinced she was killed at the hands of my father.

Another night my father belted my mother relentlessly as I watched completely powerless, the point where she had taken herself to the hospital for treatment. This was just one of many incidents that happened growing up. The fear still consumes me today. Hearing ambulance sirens takes me back.

Sometimes I would come rushing home from primary school, anxious about whether my parents got into another argument and if my mother was in danger, I would arrive in

the house looking around for evidence of any damage to ensure nothing happened during the day when I was away.

I wish I could end the story there...but later I believe I was around 10 or 11, I was sexually abused (raped) by my older brother who was 9 years older. This happened on an ongoing basis and stopped before I was 12. During the abuse I was blackmailed, manipulated, groomed, and told that if I tell my parents or anyone that I would be punished. Not only did he sexually abuse me, but I was physically and emotionally abused. At times my mother would find bruises on my arms and ask, afraid to tell I lied and said it was just from "play fighting with my brother" out of fear that my brother would punish me if I told the truth.

Sometimes I would test the waters and voice that my brother would hit me, it was never taken seriously. Many times, I was given the impression that my cries for help were unheard. My mind has compartmentalised a lot of the abuse, but the symptoms still show. A common occurrence amongst child sexual abuse (CSA) survivors.

After many years I buried these traumatic memories for over a decade, to maintain 'sanity' and to operate around family, friends, school, Uni, and work. During those times I developed chronic illnesses including shingles not knowing where it was from - later realising these illnesses were connected to suppressed trauma, I also developed eating disorders, Complex PTSD, suicidal ideation, depression and intrusive thoughts and even unpleasant hypnogogic hallucinations in times of severe stress just to name a few.

It was not until my mid-20s, I experienced many episodes of drug-induced psychosis, and these were very scary experiences that I don't wish on anyone. It was clear that this was directly connected to repressed childhood traumas.

I decided I was sick of upholding life as if I had it together, as if I could live a normal life with what happened, out of desperation I reached out to Sexual Assault Resource Centre only to be put on a waiting list for almost a year.

Eventually with each therapy session, what felt like my spirit was shattered glass in a million pieces, I slowly gathered some pieces together. Though as much as I talk about healing, the pain still feels present, the inner resources that I have developed over time during my healing journey is not for the pain to be "healed" or to leave, I can't really control that. But more to learn how to sit and live with it. I first spoke out about this 10 years ago to my mother who told my father. Their first response was "why didn't you tell me"? Which is a horrible response for a survivor to hear that and shows complete ignorance of how abuse works. Then for 7 years my family did absolutely nothing to address it.

After that time when I felt called to seek professional help, I also confronted my father and my brother and while there was some acknowledgement (after the fact that they were worried I was going to report it to the police) it was also met with deflections, defensiveness, minimising of my pain, and all-round re-traumatising. This was when I decided to officially cut contact with them and while that was the best decision for me, it caused a lot of grief at the time.

I recently have been reading survivor's stories submitted to the Royal Commission and learnt that a child sexual abuse survivor had taken his own life at this age. This motivated me to share my story here, if anyone else that has experienced abuse is reading this, I hope you find comfort or validation knowing that there are people out there who not only understand deeply but are open to talking about it - this is for you. I share this with the intentions of helping fellow survivors to release shame around their own experience.

Even though I have read many stories of Sexual Abuse during my journey I have never heard anyone in person speak about specifically child sexual abuse, until the last year I met a couple survivors and seeing them still here fighting made a whole lot of difference considering many take decades to talk about it or even acknowledge that it happened.

I had so much self-doubt sharing this in fear of readers' judgement for "taking my family's dirty laundry out" and

that they would find it humiliating, I even had people instill this fear in me. This is exactly why survivors repress themselves when what we need most is compassion, support, encouragement, and true understanding. I want people to be comfortable sitting with the uncomfortable, to shine the light on the ugly side of humanity, to become more trauma-informed, to understand how to listen, and to facilitate a space where survivors can more easily ask for help.

This post probably reflects a percentage of my lived experience, it is always a journey, the trauma is constantly shaping me, and I am constantly learning new ways, perspectives, and strategies for living with and integrating it.

The weight of this suffering is just breaking my heart open, and I want to be vulnerable. I want to expose this darkness to the world in the hope that I am shining a light on it where it cannot thrive. To reclaim my voice and contribute to breaking the silence, where perpetrators cannot thrive. To responsibly honour my rage, anguish, and terror when I was told it was ugly and unacceptable and instead allow others to do the same.



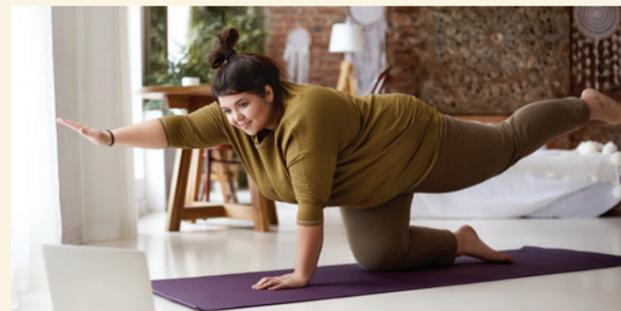
- I have a deeper Mind Body Connection I use to forget about my body. I remember to notice my body sensations more during anxiety symptoms and come out of them sooner.
- I just feel stronger, and a better person. I am not too uncertain anymore and have more confidence in myself.
- I'm more able to talk to members of my family and able to find ways to relax e.g. going to the city by myself. Being able to think about things.
- I now take time out in the day to focus on myself to check in with myself. Practicing being mindful, remembering to slow down.
- I liked the body-based therapy, and information about the mind-body connection and self-regulation.
- I appreciated the interaction with others and talking through what we were learning.
- Life gets busy, lot of stresses, so it's good to be able to evaluate in an environment created or you can stop and think and process.
- The workshop was facilitated in a manner that was encouraging, non-judgmental, freedom of choice, ease of movement / alternatives. Space for sensations to be noticed / awareness.
- I felt a change in me because it's very relaxing and I forget everything.
- I gained confidence and encouragement for the future.
- My body and mind can feel and be safe. That the unsafe feelings and sensation from the past I can be aware of and know that's where they are from which helps self-regulation in the present.
- I can be a better person, the one I want to be.
- I had someone I could talk to and trust which is important in my life because I did not know who else would 'understand' me.
- I find the flight / fight stuff interesting and how our body reacts to its surroundings.

- As a parent who was impacted by trauma, I valued exploring how do we ensure a healthy attachment with my children is sustained to protect them?
- I see life differently now, sometimes you trust someone; they can destroy you and your family. So, it takes a long time to find that trust again in human beings.
- I am loving the sessions and the feel of group energy full stop, the venue was also so conducive to this practice.

Feedback from Phoenix Clients

- One sentence gave me insight that will hasten my healing- 'abuse was done to me' so now I don't have to hold onto any guilt that it was my fault, and I actively engaged or encouraged it.
- The sense of isolation diminishes. Knowing there is no one size fits all, all walks of life, I feel more connection and affinity with myself being in the company of other 'normal' women. It has erased whatever entrenched beliefs I had and about what abused women looked like.
- My shame has been 'called out' it was never mine. I have a much healthier 'self-perspective' I feel more equipped to fit back into society. I can place anger healthily where it belongs rather than internalising.
- I am very grateful for people who care and help to put these workshops together. It has not only just helped me, but my relationships with my husband, children, and slowly to people in my life with positive health effects. Most importantly about the self-growth, acceptance, and self-compassions.
- Not that it is always comfortable (e.g., the impacts of CSA) but just identifying my internal world and reconciling my past. I understand me!
- My sense of self and understanding and affirming my reality.
- My renewed self-belief, connection to self, my value and validation - I am not my past or my feelings.
- I have learned and pieced together this messy jigsaw. I have self-realisation and have implemented self-regulation and feel I have the greatest tool ever.
- Behaviour is not identity, and it's possible to look for stressors early, it's possible to release energy and it is just energy.
- Affirmed everything I have been experiencing, studying and I know I am going to be alright.

Feedback from Trauma Transformation Program Participants



# The Dance of Drama

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

We are all so attuned to **Drama**  
Theatre – TV - the News – Netflix  
Social Climbing – Office Politics  
True Crime – even Sports

I **wonder** if you can **imagine** a World without it?

What they All have in common is :  
A **Victim** - A **Villian** - And a **Hero**

Relationships are FULL of EMOTION and DRAMA.  
I don't want to be the Hero in this **Story**.  
I want to be a **LEGEND**,  
I want to stand out.  
I want to shine and **INSPIRE**

It's time to change the vibration  
From **FEAR** and fear responses  
To **EMPOWERMENT**.  
Retrain the BRAIN.  
**NEUROFEEDBACK** IS MY HERO.  
More than that, it has changed my **VIBRATION**.  
I now have amazing access to my own **INTERNAL**  
**COACH - CREATOR - AND CHALLENGER**.  
**JOY – BLISS – HAPPINESS**  
Now come to me more naturally.

Therapy models **MUST CHANGE!!**  
I've been working on not being a **victim** for a very long time.  
I'm exhausted from being the rescuer, an enabler, a **hero**.  
And I'm working hard at keeping my **Persecutors** in check.  
I AM NOT A VICTIM

I AM NOT A SURVIOUR  
**Me. I'm a**  
**TRANSFORMATION WARRIOR**  
My **fight** has **purpose**.

Changing my vibration to **EMPOWERMENT**  
Instead of the Dances of FEAR and DRAMA  
Is **changing my Life**.  
It makes me **Smile. A lot. Inside and out**.

You want to **HELP?**  
Be my **COACH**.  
Give me **guidance** and **knowledge**.  
**CHALLENGE** my limiting beliefs **and** your own.  
**Encourage** me to **Walk my Talk**  
Engage my **CREATOR** to **FOCUS** on a different **vision**

**MY** pathway to healing has been  
To break free from the Dances of Anger and Drama  
And to push my imagination and impulsiveness  
Towards the **Dance of EMPOWERMENT**.

**YES**  
My name is **Briddie WILDE**  
Thank you for  
**Walking on the Wildside**



## The Wheatfield

BY EMMA E ©



I feel as though I'm walking through a wind tunnel, surrounded by ghosts and memory.

Ears drumming with an onslaught of voices.

Whisps of hair whipping about my face, stinging my bloodshot eyes. Pressure building against me, pushing on me, making each step forward feel arduous and pointless.

I close my eyes to it all, waiting for the peace to come but those voices scream louder.

My eyes feel raw now, scratched from the salt of tears held back, from those so old I dare not release, for fear a torrent would follow.

And that pressure heavy and suffocating, moves in on me.

Deep into my chest like two fat hands, gripping at my ribs, stealing my breath and succeeding to block out the tiny pulsating light that shines within.

I want to run, I want to scream, I want to escape to a quiet place but there is no peace. I feel cold, lost and defeated.

I collapse, my voice feels hoarse like I've been bellowing into the wind.

I whisper, "I'm done, I surrender".

I withdraw the need to keep walking, to keep pushing against the ghosts, instead I open my eyes to inspect them. A frightened toddler crying in a wheatfield, a child shrieking in a dark room begging to be heard.

A shamed teen wiping blood from her thighs, an obese woman paralyzed and breathless on a hospital gurney and finally one who looks just like me.

She is shadowed and distorted from the substances that numb her pain, painted with psychological bruises from a love turned violent.

They were all calling out to me, they pleaded for my help, screamed for their freedom but I had been ignorant.

I kept them trapped.

I look down to find the hands surrounding my heart were my own.

Knuckles white from squeezing so hard, squeezing to muffle that light.

I release and the pulsing gets stronger, the light starts to expand as it reaches out of me.

It touches the distorted version, bringing clarity and light to her shadows.

It motivates the obese woman and brings opportunity and courage.

It wipes the blood from the fallen teenager and removes her shame. It shines its light into the darkened room and soothes the shrieking child.

It stretches further still until it reaches the wheatfield.

Softly it surrounds the babe, lifts her from the dusty ground and nurtures.

It speaks to her with a deep compassion,

"You are protected"

"You are worthy"

"You are loved"

That light that grew from me passes back into this child destroying the darkness that resided in her.

So powerful and bright, this light evolves still.

It extends out towards others and seeks to teach them, to help them switch on their light within.

The darkness may prevail at times and be so powerfully oppressive.

I try to sit quietly, to bathe in the sunlight with the babe.

I am her and she is me, though we were strangers once.

I lean into the roaring wind and remind her of her goodness, her safety and her significance.

Though my earliest memory was being fed iniquity, I now seek to nurse the babe within.

To nourish her with a love she never knew.

And swaddle her in a peace she will one day grow to accept.

## The House on the Hill

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

Sometimes I am big  
Sometimes I am small  
Sometimes I am nothing,  
Nothing at all.

This World it is big  
My world it is small  
How can I get out there  
When I'm chained to the floor?

Yes, you can do it  
Reach for the stars  
Yes, I can see them  
But I'm behind bars.

Excluded from work  
Excluded from play  
I have very little  
And still, I must pay.

I fight for my freedom  
I battle each day  
Then told I'm too angry  
And still, I must stay.

You stand on my head  
And call me nasty names  
How can you say  
This is all just a game.

So much for fairness  
The game it is rigged  
I've paid a high price  
For the things that you did.

Life isn't easy  
Of that I am sure  
But how can I get through  
If you won't open the door.

I don't have the keys  
I stare at the lock  
It really does feel  
Like you don't give a fuck.

Children are precious  
But are thrown in the bin  
And yet you still blame them  
What a terrible sin.

Locked up and beaten  
By a system so huge  
Say it's Me who must change  
While I polish your shoes

Yes Sir, no Sir  
3 bags full  
Why do you treat me  
Like a stupid fool?

You push and you poke  
From your house on the hill  
Demanding austerity  
While you get fatter still.

'You can do better'  
Say the rich to the poor  
'I'd love to' I say  
'If you open the door.'

# The Kitchen - "Peas"

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©

Everybody's talkin' about it.  
And Nobody's pointin' out  
The things that are goin' on

Whispers in corridors  
Faces behind closed doors  
Lift their heads in wait  
Listening hard to hear the sound  
Of bodies landing on the ground  
Before they dare to speak.

Yells and cusses  
Not their problem  
What's inside they cannot see  
And even when it reaches the street  
No help comes.  
No welfare check.  
Outta control  
But not bad enough yet  
For anyone to intervene.

No referee in the domestic ring.  
Cage fight to the core.  
Unfairly matched, he dominates  
Blood spilt upon the floor.

And fight she does  
With babe in arms  
Held tightly as a shield.

Thunder roared.  
His fists fly  
Her arms around the baby boy.  
The kitchen small  
She has nowhere to go

The baby boy screams.  
The mother is lifeless.  
The screaming won't stop.  
The pot of peas on the stove  
Is boiling over.  
Dinner, half served  
Going cold on the countertop.

A little girl, with her back to the wall.  
Sat frozen and silent,  
And held her breath  
Not sure if the thunder still roared..?  
Or if she'd suddenly gone deaf.

Everything felt kinda floaty  
As her Dad, sat her mother up.  
He switched off the stove,  
Grabbed a kitchen rag  
And gingerly dabbed at the blood.  
She snatched the tea towel from his hands  
And held it to her arm.

The baby cried.  
The mother, blank,  
Dragged herself to her feet.  
The father with a deadly stare  
Made a hastily retreat.

She put the child in his highchair.  
His lungs still bellowing hard.  
And with one arm wrapped, but bleeding,  
She served up the meal  
On a table that was round.

She mashed the vegies  
Blew on them to check it was cool  
And spooned it to the babe.  
She told the girl to get back in her chair  
And to eat her dinner and behave.

The baby ate hungrily.  
It's original source of protest.  
The little girl pushed her peas around the plate  
Still shaking from what she had witnessed.

The father was gone  
But his plate sat in quiet wait  
In the place where a father belonged.  
Mummy's plate was stacked on the sink  
The broken pieces still in view.

The baby took another spoon  
The mother stared down into space.



The little girl played with her peas and corn  
While watching Mummy's blank face  
As they all recovered from the storm.

The baby cried.  
The spoon went in.  
The girl fidgeted in her chair  
Too scared to speak,  
Until she finally caught her mother's eye.

"Stop mucking around  
It's time for bed.  
Finish it or not.  
I don't care  
What your father says  
Bedtime.  
GO..!!"

The little girl bolts  
Off to her room  
At the far end of the house  
Banished to talk to the moon  
As quietly as a mouse.

She whispers her dreams.  
And listens to the stories,  
She reads to herself  
From the pages of long told fables.  
And other children's books  
And imagines a World  
Where kitchens are safe  
For little girls to cook.

# A Survivor Story

## FROM A PHOENIX CLIENT

I honestly did not know how to open this story of my journey of being a survivor of abuse and becoming a motherless mother. In fact, it took me a few days to process it and then I remembered a trip to Cowaramup in Western Australia. I was seven months pregnant, myself and my husband decided to take a trip before baby arrived on our doorstep. We were in a little spiritual store browsing the local goods, there was a wicker basket with a heap of cards in it. The shop attendant caught me looking at the cards and prompted me to select a card and see what it had to reveal to me. Now I am a sceptic, and I don't hold any beliefs of higher beings, so this lady must have had great body reading skills or she just saw the anger brimming in my eyes, or she really is spiritually in tune. I blindly picked a card with a dragon picture on it, she says something along the lines of "I have to be careful when I talk/communicate because my words could burn like dragon fire, I have a lot of anger and fiery emotions so I would be better to write rather than speak". Honestly, I was gob smacked, lady how did you just read me like a book. I do not talk of my experiences because yes, my emotions do get the better of me, I either blow up or shut down and I am working on this issue, however writing is a tool that I could use. So now I will tell you how becoming a mother gave way to a beast, a traumatized beast to rise-up and almost choke me.

I have not spoken to my mother for almost a decade now, a choice I made to protect myself. She is 55 and still not in a great place, last year she was admitted to hospital for mental health issues and diagnosed with Complex PTSD and Borderline Personality Disorder. During the last decade she married for the fourth time, moved to the other side of the country, handed off her youngest to my sister and went back to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the latter which I just cannot comprehend. Before this there was disagreements and general distrust, she wouldn't or couldn't take responsibility for what happened with us kids. To top it off after our abuser had admitted guilt and spent time in jail, she went back to him, after all she knew

and had experienced herself. We suffered seven years of hell with this man, domestic, sexual, mental, emotional, physical, neglectful abuse in which he used the laws of the Jehovah's Witnesses to justify his actions. So, the original and first wounding was caused by him and her acceptance of his behaviour, the second wounding came when she abandoned us and went back to the monster who calls himself a man. She did eventually leave but the trust was broken, the heart broken. I was and still am carrying a house of trauma on my back.

Now I was managing this poorly but still living with sporadic therapy sessions, medication, heavy obsessions, eating, bad relationships, alcohol. I was living and going with the flow of life, I met my now husband and had two ectopic pregnancies with resulted in losing my left fallopian tube. This was leading to a heavy depression, all I wanted was a kid of my own. A chance to be a great mother and the chance to prove I was better than my own mother and I was not her. July 2018 I was to become pregnant again, but I didn't know until I had helped us move to a new house (carrying boxes up and down stairs) and starting Certificate IV in Mental Health. I was walking a couple of kilometres to get to TAFE and not understanding why I was feeling like I could pass out. I had taken a pregnancy test four days before my birthday and it was positive, I went straight to King Edward Hospital as I feared another ectopic pregnancy, but all the tests were strong and pregnancy hormones were high, it was finally happening. I was pregnant and that angry dragon inside me decided it was time to raise its head. Anxiety was running high and I was to become a mother without my mother in my life.

There was a test that could be done at ten weeks called a NIPS test, which checks the fetal DNA in the mother's DNA. It checks for any chromosomal abnormalities and can also reveal the gender of the baby. Now when I became pregnant, I absolutely wished for a boy, I feared

having a girl, as how was I to protect her in this patriarchal world, how would I stop her from being abused, how could I stop her from being used based on her gender. How could I possibly mother a girl without being choked by fear and anxiety.

Now I'm not saying boys do not get abused, they most definitely do, but I was putting myself in her shoes without realising it, I was making her live my trauma without her actually experiencing it. The test was done, and I anxiously awaited the results, the doctor called me over the phone, myself and my husband listened over speakerphone, no chromosome abnormality-s, and now for the gender reveal. In my head I repeated be a boy, be a boy. The doctor speaks loudly and directly "It's a girl", like seriously, I felt the world drop away from me, alarms blared in my head, emotional triggers everywhere, the world was out to get me and my unborn child, I had the worst luck in the world apparently. Anxiety absolutely took over me, I dropped out of TAFE, I dropped out of the world. I nestled us away in the house with 24/7 morning sickness and re-runs of TV shows "Fraser" and "Medium". I could not risk her to the world. I went out occasionally when my husband was off work and managed a three-hour shift at work a week. I was in an anxiety rest mode, looking back now I probably could've reached out more but I was used to managing things alone and not being a burden.

The whole midwife appointments and birthing process sucked, not going to lie. I wouldn't say they are trauma informed and they ask once if you ever experienced domestic violence, I answered no because I couldn't be bothered with the questioning. I did tell them I lived with Complex PTSD, anxiety and depression, to which they replied with "our psychologists are booked out, do you have your own?". Luckily, I did at the time. My daughter was born via emergency c-section after a failed inducement attempt because amniocytic fluids were low, the placenta cord was not working efficiently, and she was

under size. She was 2.8 kilograms, not the smallest for a full-term baby. I felt like a failure already, the midwives militantly pushed breast feeding, which ended with me breaking down and my daughter readmitted due to jaundice. The breast feeding did continue, I felt pressured to, and continued till she recently turned three. This was a trigger for me, I couldn't watch her breast feed, I always had a shirt covering. I lost myself, I lost my self-care, I lost my time. I lost hold of the angry traumatized child inside of myself. Sarah did not sleep, still does not sleep, I lost my sleep, I became more and more irritable. I was on guard all the time, protecting Sarah from ghosts in my head, I was so petrified of her being hurt or abused. I was having non-stop anxiety dreams, I dreamt I was at work and I realised Sarah was at home alone and I couldn't find a way of getting to her. During the day I was quickly getting tired and angry, I tried to garden, paint the house, or draw but I was always interrupted by Sarah, I was getting resentful and angry. I knew I had to change, this was not a path to be on, I should be enjoying my child not avoiding her. I started going to a Ngala playgroup to try and connect with other parents, and to encourage Sarah to leave my side occasionally, she must have picked up on my anxiety. I couldn't hack the mothers' groups or the play groups I was too self-aware and I was judging myself against other parents and I couldn't genuinely connect with other people while I was feeling this way.

I went to the Doctor to get a mental health plan done up and get myself on a psychologist's waiting list, again luck or not, I had found a Doctor that had been told about a place called Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service, specialising in counselling sexual abuse victims. I called them straight away, done two assessment appointments and within the month they had accepted me as a client and had a therapist ready for me. I was ready to talk about being angry and about the past, but the same theme

kept coming up, my mother. In becoming a mother, I was seeing her in a different perspective, a different light, I was beginning to question her behaviour, how she treated us kids, how she was complicit in the abuse. I was in ways angrier with her than our actual abuser. I started to have reoccurring PTSD dreams, I would be in an old house with my mother and the abuser(him), I am the age I am now and I just yell at them both, she ignores me always, and I try to move her out of the house. He usually just laughs at me, and I hit and punch him, but he doesn't shut up. The last dream I had I was murdering him, so yes, the dreams are quite unnerving, and I usually wake up upset, angry and the tension pain is kicking on in my neck, head, and shoulders. Then I roll over and see Sarah's face, she co sleeps with me, a combination of dealing with sleep terrors and me with feeling safer with her sleeping with me. I see her face and I remember where I am, I am here now, I am not there in the past in his grips and yelling at a mother who does not want to see. I am now starting EMDR treatment again to process this trauma, so I will be a better person for myself, my family and most importantly Sarah.

I'm trying my hardest to not let this trauma beast run wild, not the let the generational trauma carry on. I want Sarah to have a great life and it will be an uphill struggle while I'm dragging this trauma around.

While I was struggling it occurred to me, I can't be the only parent struggling with this, yet it is almost impossible to find resources that support the now adult victims of abuse. I found a book called Parenting with PTSD that offered insight from other parents. But honestly there is not a lot, yet I know according to statistics that there are thousands of us recovering abuse survivors that are now parents. What holds us back to connecting? The shame, the minimizing, the pressure to act and appear as a perfect parent, the fear that people would judge us harshly if they knew our pasts or hold the myth that all those abused turn into abusers. There is a lot more that could be done for us,

from the moment we are to become parents the medical professionals around us should be trauma informed, we need support for our children and importantly us. So, for now I carry on with my therapy and keep looking to the future where trauma does not hold me prisoner, where I am part of the community and part of my child's community.



## The Cost of Surviving

BY L HARVEY ©

FROM HER BOOK IN THE MAKING, "FOREVER IN DARKNESS"

"I survived 25 years of abuse,  
But I wish I didn't,  
My body struggles with years of misuse,  
Living is non-existent.

Surviving isn't living,  
A mind that is a prison,  
With a child or teenager driving,  
An adult, empty and broken.

Desperate to be freed,  
A lifetime of suffering in silence,  
My scars bleed,  
But somehow determined to make a difference.

A little girl's soul shattered,  
A developing brain that was wired wrongly,  
Continually emotionally triggered,  
Leaving me forever lonely.

Suffocating from unstable emotions,  
Darkness dominates my life,  
A life filled with negative perceptions,  
And failing to end it all with a knife.

Burdened by a series of trauma's,  
Re victimised in teens and adulthood,  
Battling through life with mental health disorders,  
Pain and darkness that is not understood.

Dissociation protects me,  
Anger gives me power to fight,  
Depression and anxiety paralyses me,  
But in spite of this, I fight hard for the light.

Battling and suffering through daily life and daily tasks,  
Tormented by guilt and shame that runs through my veins,  
That no ordinary person can grasp,  
Ultimately challenging my parts to not see my life go up in flames.



# The Dragon's Breath

BY BRIDDIE WILDE ©



The Dragon's Breath drifts  
Quickly  
Deeply  
Sweetly  
And puts My Soul to Sleep  
The bittersweet smoke, acid and sharp  
Makes the Child gently Gasp  
And with the intake of THAT Breath  
Separations from Body  
A Pure Release

For Sleeping Beauty  
A Lifetime is LOST  
No glass display case  
No Protection from  
The Elements at Large

This Sleeping Beauty  
Walks the streets  
In pouring rain  
Sleepwalking  
From Dawn to Dusk

A Life. A Dream  
A series of Grimm's Fairytales  
And Puff the Majic Dragon  
With trinket gifts  
Into His World inhaled.

The Dragon's Breath.  
I feel it !  
Tickling the back of my throat.  
A scratchy cough in the top of My chest  
The only resistance I can Show.

I disappear quickly  
Falling, like Alice, down the rabbit-hole  
And dream of things, not quite right  
Shifts in Shadows  
Shifts in Flow

I hit the bottom with a THUMP  
And My Body jumps Awake.  
In My Bed where I Belong  
But why am I cold in my sheets??

The Dragon's Breath  
A blessing some would say  
And you might think Me MAD  
But it Protected Me from knowing things

My body Never Forgot  
It shielded me from PAIN  
From the screams I would have heard.  
The Dragon's Breath  
Kept Me Warm and Safe  
Deep in Dimble Dumble Land.

Beware the Dragon's Breath  
And the Deep Desire to Sleep  
The Crave is most Seductive  
Of All the things We seek.

The CRAVE  
The DESIRE  
The Calling Back to Universe  
It takes Great Effort to Master  
Keeping feet to Mortal Earth.

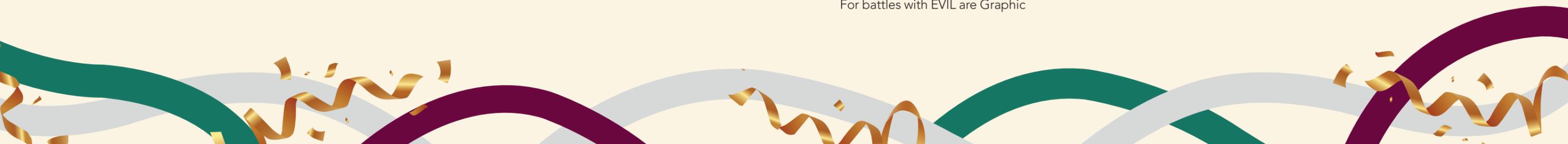
The Dragon's Breath  
Still Haunts My Dreams.  
Releasing Whispers of TRUTH  
My body has NEVER Forgotten  
It has always held the Score.

I weave together the threads of my Stories  
Into a Canvas of Epic Medieval Scale.  
Stitch by Stitch,  
Day by Day  
With Extraordinary results.

A Tapestry of Colours Bold  
Of battles Epic and Raw  
Where the forces of Good and Evil  
Share the battle fore  
And open displays of Gore  
For battles with EVIL are Graphic

To Pretend otherwise is to Ignore  
The Life and Death battle  
When you've Danced  
With the Dragon's Breath

To Trudge for Decades  
Lost in the Valleys  
Of the Shadows of Death.  
Following the dusky paths  
Of My Nightmares and Dreams  
I now step free-  
Free from the Dragon's Breath.





## Witnessing the Birth of Warrior Women

LOUISE LAMONT ©

Acceptance, the gift she gave herself  
Then wept as she recognised her innocence  
The truth that was there all of time  
Hidden behind her burden of shame  
Not knowing where that reality would take her  
An endless journey of time  
Hardly ever stopping to take in the view  
Hardly ever time for even a breath  
Seeing something new inspired her to stop  
Rearrange the patterns, the words  
A new language, a new way of being was possible  
She had held that hope all along  
Just waiting until she was strong enough  
To allow for her birth

If you are interested in supporting Phoenix, tax deductible donations can be made via our website [www.phoenix.asn.au](http://www.phoenix.asn.au) by clicking on the  link.



~~~~~  
*I have found everybody I've been in contact with at Phoenix are very professional and compassionate. I have come a long way since attending Phoenix. This counselling thing is extremely hard, and I have been supported all the way. Well done to the clerical staff, they're always pleasant and make you feel welcome and at ease.*  
~~~~~

Phoenix Client

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*Since attending Phoenix, I have felt supported and encouraged to share my experiences in a safe and secure environment. My journey has felt painful and traumatic. However, Phoenix has given me the support needed to cope with the journey to healing. My Counsellor is professional, non-judgmental and gives me the freedom to explore my feelings and emotions in a safe and protected environment. I am grateful to be able to access such a great service.*  
~~~~~

Phoenix Client