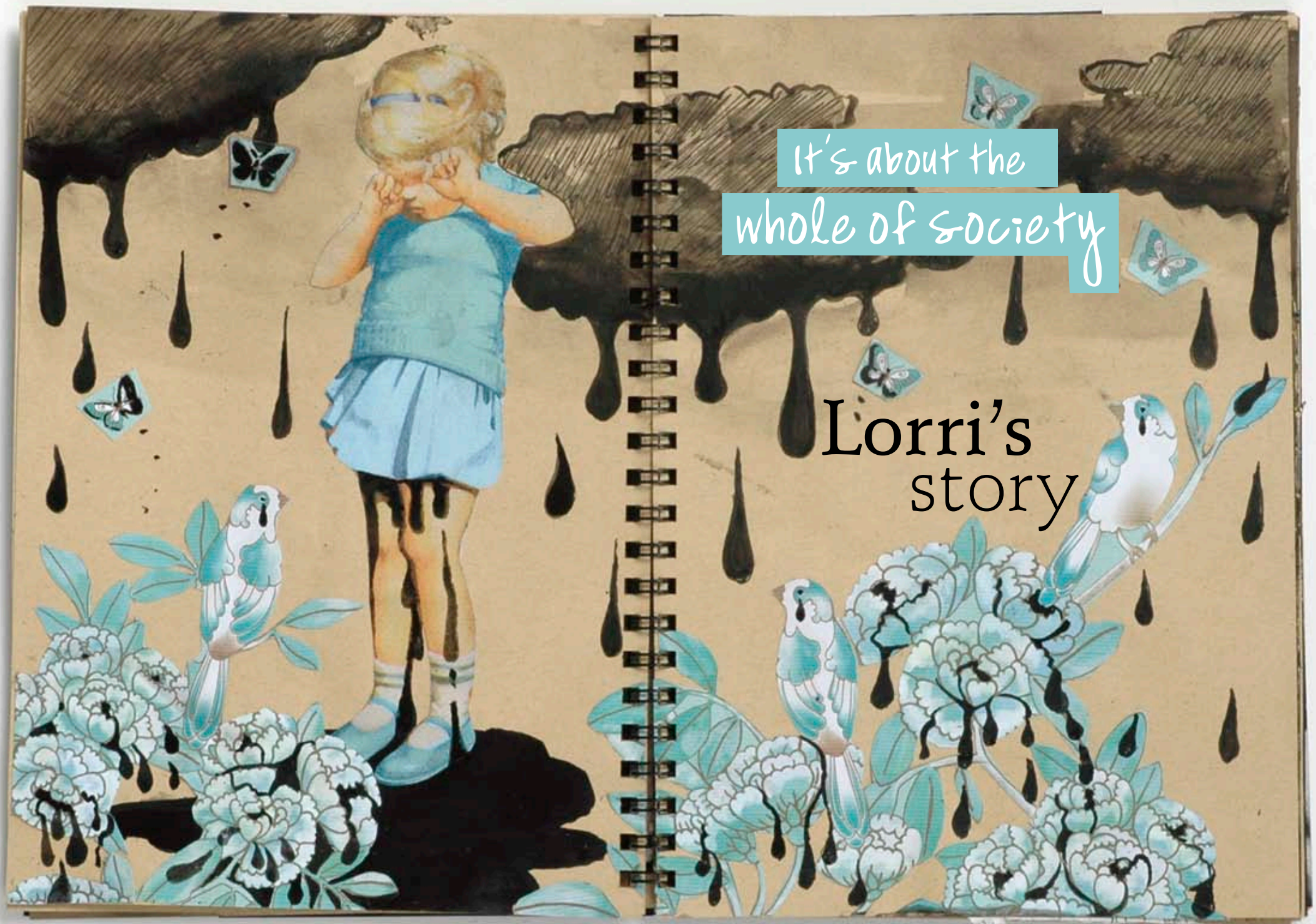


It's about the  
whole of society

# Lorri's story



I remember lying in bed when I was quite little and hearing my father's footsteps coming down the passageway, and just the way he was walking I could tell if it was the monster or my Daddy. I knew the difference between the sickness and my father and between the behaviour and human being. You just knew which of those personalities were there and whether he intended to do you any harm from the way he was walking.

I lost that understanding as I got older but I got it back through counselling as I put myself back together again. In the middle I hated my father and I also hated my mother because I felt she sacrificed us children to her own fear.

But I hated society most. I hated all the neighbours and the teachers who did nothing. I used to fantasize about having a machine gun and mowing people down. When that started happening in America, my colleagues in the field of family violence would say "how can somebody do that?" And I'd say "how could you *not* understand it?"

I had an aunt who was only two years older than me. When we were adults I told her how much I hated the world because nobody had helped, and she said that at least twice people had contacted the child welfare. It felt so good to know that people had done something. But when my brother ran away at 13 and went to the police

station, he begged them not to take him home. They were so concerned that they took him to a doctor, but they did bring him home. They told my parents not to hit him, but of course they did – and of course the police knew they would.

My grandmother, my mother's mother, was my lifeline. She got me out of the house as often as she could, and I'd go for holidays with her and my aunt, who was just slightly older than me. My grandmother said it broke her heart to see me running round trying to do everything I could to help my mother with the children. I was the eldest and there were two more children before I was three. I wanted to help my mother because I thought that she could get us out of there.

My mother had married an alcoholic and a gambler, a man who was already lost and terrified and therefore violent. (I believe that what people think of as anger is fear. When people take on the role of abuser, they are already lost in the injustice of the life they have led. And of course they are drawn to other people like that. So he and my mother, whose father was also an alcoholic, were drawn to each other.)

My father had had a horrific childhood. His mother was an alcoholic and was married a number of times and had other lovers. My father was brought up between these different men and orphanages and his grandmother. He was a lost, angry

young man, and then he lied about his age and went to World War II. He was a genius with figures but because he was a gambler he wasted all his money. My mother used to walk for miles and clean other people's houses and take in ironing.

When I was about twelve my mother decided to become a psychiatric nurse. If you are scared you are crazy, you either get yourself locked up in one of those places or you go and work there – to convince yourself that the others are the crazy ones. In some ways my mother was a strong and stropky woman, and she got quite high up in the mental health field. But another part of her was a terrified child who stayed in violence until my father died – and lived in denial afterwards. There was nothing warm about my mother.

My father was the cuddly, gentle, loving one. After our hair was washed, he'd gently dry it and brush it. That was very separate from his abusive behaviour.

Both my parents were emotionally, verbally and physically violent, and they used to have rip roaring fights.

If I did something wrong I'd get a hiding, but I'd also get one if the other children did something wrong because I was the eldest and responsible for them. My mother used to break wooden spoons on us, but she found that it was very hard to break the little wooden brush that went with the dustpan. She lived in a state of suppressed rage, so any excuse was good enough. If she was really angry, she'd beat us up, put one in each corner of the passageway and say "wait till your father gets home".



...just the way he was walking I could tell if it was the monster or my Daddy.

My father used the razor strop – on which men sharpened their razors. It was a couple of feet long, with buckles in a couple of places, and it could really rip your skin. He made us drop our pants, so there was always a sexual side to it too. Sometimes when my mother told him to beat us, he would use the belt against himself – but you still had to scream because she would be listening.

My father was also sexually violent. People talk as if domestic violence is about physical violence but all incest is domestic violence and a lot of the sexual abuse by family friends and

neighbours is too. Recent research figures from the Ministry of Women's Affairs have shown that 75% of all sexual violence is domestic violence – because it occurs in the home.

My father had a mate from the war. We called him Uncle Alex. I have a clear memory from when I was about five of being up in my parents' bedroom with my sister. I remember holding on to my father's leg, thinking "thank God, it's not me this time", and also feeling shame that I was thinking this because I was meant to be looking after my little sister, as this man sexually abused her.

I heard my mother come into the house and I thought she'd come and rescue us. By the time she opened the door I was on the bed comforting my sister and both of the men were on the other side of the room. My mother took a step into the room and then I saw the shutters drop, and she just went blank and backed out.

My mother is very dissociated, and I was for a long time too. Dissociative identity disorder is a childhood survival system and part of post traumatic stress syndrome – where people lock away that memory and those feelings into part of themselves

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that they then disconnect from so that they can cope and keep going. If you have on-going abuse in the first developmental stage, up to about seven, it is a very common survival system.

My two worst beatings were administered by my mother – because I had gone to the ice skating rink as a teenager. She gave us chores to do while she was at work and we'd get hidings because they weren't done well enough or because we'd broken something. I remember thinking I'd never hit my children just because something was broken – that feelings had to be more important than a cup.

I used to tell my siblings "do this, don't do that, make sure you're back by five" and go to the skating club. A couple of times I was caught out by my mother, and she ripped into me with the razor strop. I just lay there on the bed taking it and thinking that for my mother to do this, I must be a terrible person and deserve it. At that stage I hated my father and I thought my mother was the good guy. Both times my father had to drag her off because she'd just totally lost it and could have killed me if he hadn't intervened.

The last hiding I ever got from my father was one New Year's Eve. I had gone to a friend's house and we both came back and said we wanted to go to another friend's place. My parents were sitting in the garden, and my

mother said I couldn't go. I pleaded, and that made her mad. She said "go to your room, you're going to get a hiding" – because I'd "ruined" New Year's Eve.

My father came in with the razor strop and started beating me. But I just stood there. I wouldn't bend, and I didn't make a sound. One of the beauties of dissociation is that you can just cut off – though I didn't understand that then. He got so angry with me because I wasn't crying or doing any of the things that meant he could stop. He hit me harder and harder, ripping me to shreds. He said "I can keep this up longer than you can". I didn't answer him. Finally he broke down and sobbed. He never hit me again.

My childhood set me up to be a walking target. One day when I was about 14, I sneaked off down to the ice rink and some guys offered me a drink. Then we piled into a car to get more booze, and they took me off somewhere and gang raped me. I lost a beautiful watch my mother had given me, and I was really upset about it and everyone was trying to find it and the guys were apologising because they were my mates, and some of them were sorry about what they'd done. But to me what they had done was normal, it was just part of how life was because you have been conditioned to be a victim. It's as though other people, abusers, knew

I was a victim, as if they could smell it, as if there was an energy around me.

When I was 15, I got glandular fever and I was so sick I was hospitalised. Shortly afterwards I left school and got a job in a bank. I moved out of home into a boarding house a friend lived in. My parents got the police to come to my work and take me home.



This happened several times, and I lost my job because they said they couldn't have the police turning up.

Then I got a job in an insurance company. I went to the police station and said I had left home and I wasn't going back. They got my parents – who told me that the police had said to them, "You can't tie her to the bedpost. Let her go for a few days and she'll come crawling back." But I was determined not to go home.

I went nursing, and I had a mental breakdown – though I didn't realise that's what it was at the time. I kept fainting and having terrible headaches. One day I overheard one of the nurses say, "There's nothing wrong with her, she's just having a nervous breakdown". At that point, I walked out of the hospital and didn't go back.

One day my father came to the boarding house I was living in and asked me to go home, but I wouldn't. I was arrested and charged with being

a neglected child – because I was neglecting myself. In court the judge asked my mother if she wanted me at home. My mother said, “If there’s one little part of her that wants to come home, we do”. The judge asked me if there was a little part of me that wanted to go home, and I said no. He got really angry and said I was ungrateful and that I was lucky I had parents who wanted me. But nobody asked me why I didn’t want to go home.

I was put into the custody of child welfare and sent to the juvenile maximum detention centre. They put me in a cell, and for the first time in my life I felt safe. I loved it. I felt I had my first childhood there. I could be an irresponsible child, and it was lovely.

I had a terrible pain inside and the only way I could get a break from it was to be smashed. At 16, I was drinking all the time and smoking three packets of cigarettes a day.

It’s very easy for people to do whatever they like to you when all you are interested in is being out of it. Nobody’s looked after you, and you don’t know how to look after yourself. You don’t know how to cope with the world. You just mimic other people’s behaviour to learn how to be a grown up.

As well as being a victim of violence I was already an abuser myself. My girlfriend, Millie, and I once had an

argument, and the next minute we were having a punch up. We used to carry knives, and one night we were at a party and I was trapped in a bedroom and the hall was lined with guys. They were Millie’s mates so they weren’t going to touch her, but one of them was going to rape me. I was screaming for her but she couldn’t get through the hall. I heard her say “use your bloody knife, you silly bitch”. I got my knife out of my boot and was holding it, terrified and shaking, saying “leave me alone, I don’t want to hurt you”. But this guy came for me. I ripped his thigh open with my knife. He was bleeding and screaming, and everyone was in shock. Millie came though and grabbed me, and we ran off.

When I turned 18, the police picked me up yet again for being drunk and disorderly. They took me down to the station and put me in a cell. I said, “You can’t keep me here. You’ve got to get the child welfare people.” They said, “But we can, because you’ve had your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.”

I realised this would keep happening. So I left the city, and got a bar job in a little town in a farming community. The people there saw themselves as quite middle class, and I was just a barmaid and not good enough for their sons. I was raped by some men there, but when I went to the police, they refused to do anything about it.

So I went back to Fremantle and hooked up with a girlfriend who was staying at a big old house. One day I woke up to find a whole lot of guys round me who were going to gang rape me. I curled up in the foetal position and started whimpering like a small child. One of the men protected me from the others. He was a heavy duty crim, and they weren’t going to take him on.

Next day he asked me to live with him, and I did because I thought that once I belonged to him no one else would touch me. But when he was away, I’d be back on the streets.

I knew a woman who wanted to get away from her violent husband. He was arrested and put in jail. She packed up the kids and took off to Adelaide, and I went with her. I hitchhiked back, but I wanted to return to Adelaide, so I decided to work as a prostitute to get some money. I was down at a hotel with some friends, and an old guy picked me up. I went back to his hotel room. I was terrified but acting tough. I made him put the \$20 on the table first, and then he started taking his clothes off. I just freaked out. Now I understand that he reminded me of my father, but I didn’t understand that then. I grabbed the money and took off. That was the beginning and end of my career as a prostitute.

I never met a prostitute who didn’t come from a background of sexual abuse. None of the prostitutes

I worked with as a sexual abuse counsellor ever knew a prostitute, male or female, who hadn’t been sexually abused. People who have been sexually abused feel worthless. They feel that’s all they’re good for. Many feel that for the whole of their life people have “been getting this for nothing”. So there’s a false sense of power in prostitution; they make people pay for it, and they feel in charge now. But the reality is that they are continuing to be abused.

When I realised I was pregnant, I was delighted because I felt I would have someone who would love me – this little baby. One night when I was about three months pregnant I was out drinking with a friend who took off, and a guy offered me a lift home. In the car he came on to me. I said no, and he started punching me. I punched him back, but he was bigger and stronger. When he punched me in the stomach, I said “be careful, I don’t want you to hurt the baby”. So he had me: you stop fighting or I’ll kill the baby.

He raped me. Afterwards he told me to get out of the car and fix my clothes, and as I was doing so, a police car came along. They had this guy before he had his pants back on, and this hysterical woman who was black and blue from being beaten up and raped and terrified because she might lose her baby. But these detectives knew me, and their attitude



was "what do you expect?" They took me down to the station, but they wouldn't get a doctor. They got a statement from the man saying he'd done it, but they were trying to convince me to let them charge him with something minor. As dawn was breaking, I ran out of rage and said "just take me home". They did charge him with something minor.

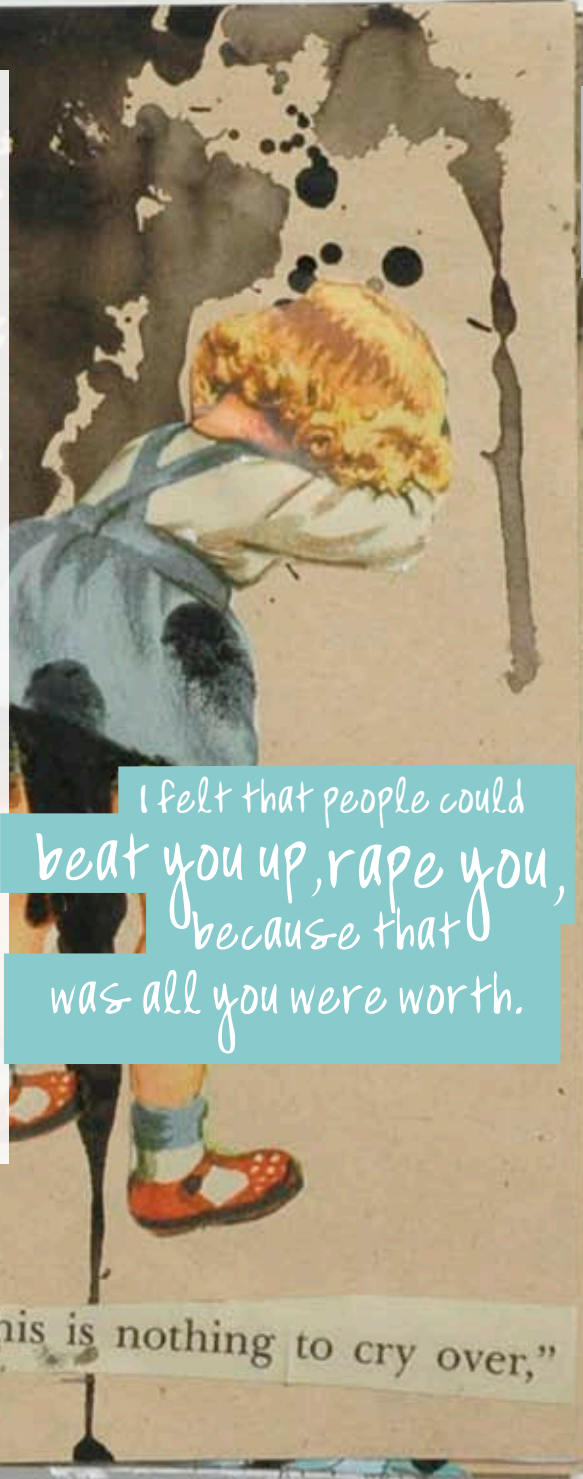
I felt the police had raped me too by not dealing with my rape properly. One of the reasons they hated me was because some of my friends were Aboriginal women, and these policemen used to go into the hotels and say to them "you come with us". They used to tell the women they had a choice – have sex with them or be put in jail for the night. It was rape, but for these women it was just part of life.

When my parents found out I was pregnant my father came to the boarding house and said, "This is killing your mother. You've got to come home." So I went home. The police not charging the man who raped me with rape had been the last straw. I felt that people could beat you up, rape you, do whatever they liked to you because that was all you were worth.

I had my baby and worked in the local pub as a waitress. My sister was working in a cray-fishing village up the coast and she invited me there for a party. I met up with the guy I'd been living with who I believed was the father of my baby. He asked me to move up there, and because it was a way out of home and I thought he'd take care of me, I did.

But he was incredibly violent and controlling. If he found out that I'd left the flat, even to take the rubbish out, he'd beat me up. I got away a few times but while part of me was relieved, another part would pick up the phone and tell him to come and get me.

Then I had to have an operation because I had to have an ovary removed because of cysts. I wasn't allowed to have sex but when I went home, my partner raped me. I was bleeding and had to get the doctor, and he told me off for having sex. I thought the only way out would be to go crazy, and then I'd be locked in a padded room. So I got hammers and nails and locked the windows and barred the door, and sat in a corner of the bathroom rocking and screaming – going crazy. I wanted my partner to call an ambulance but he just got drunk with his friends. Every now and again someone would come and try to get through to me. This went on for days.



I felt that people could beat you up, rape you, because that was all you were worth.

"This is nothing to cry over,"

My partner tried to make me stop and ended up splitting my head open with his fist. When they were all asleep I just walked out and hitchhiked to my parents' house. My mother's attitude was "you made your bed, you lie in it". But she wasn't there, and my father got a doctor and went back with me to collect my 20-month-old baby. I told the police about the burglaries my partner and his mates had done. So I burnt my bridges. I had no doubt he would kill me if he could get his hands on me.

I thought there was nothing to do but be how my parents wanted me to be. Obviously acting out didn't get anyone to realise something was wrong or get me any help. And a guy wasn't going to protect me. You find one man to protect you from men, but who's going to protect you from that man? I still didn't get that I was the one who had to learn how to protect me.

I started going out with a policeman, Rod. He was separated and rented a house with a couple of friends. He trained horses for a mate who had a trotting stable, and I used to get up early and do this with him. One day my father went into a tirade and told me I had to leave home, and I rang Rod and asked if I could stay at his flat. I moved into his room, as there was no other, and into his bed, and we had another bed for my daughter.

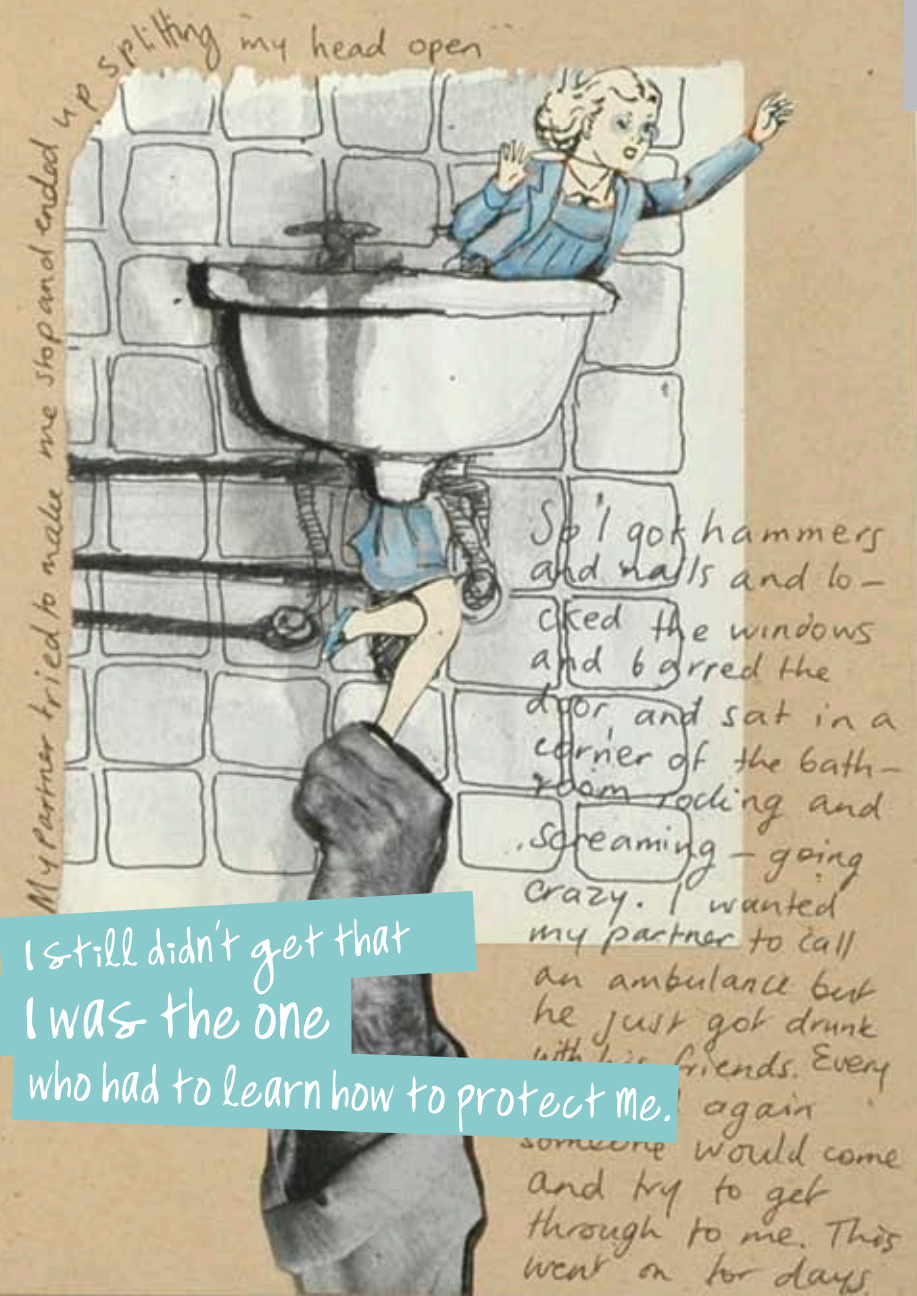
Rod had two girlfriends he used to go and stay with, and I really liked that set-up because I didn't feel he owned

me. I felt we were friends. But then he decided that he loved me, and started saying "do you love me?" I said, "I don't know what love is, but if I did, I'm sure I would." He said either I had to become his partner or we'd have to stop seeing each other. So I decided I loved him too. I felt I'd been blackmailed into it because otherwise I'd lose the only support I'd ever had.

We'd been together for years and I was pregnant with our son when the new no-fault divorce law came in. We were first on the list. I was nine months and one week pregnant when he got a divorce, and we married the same afternoon.

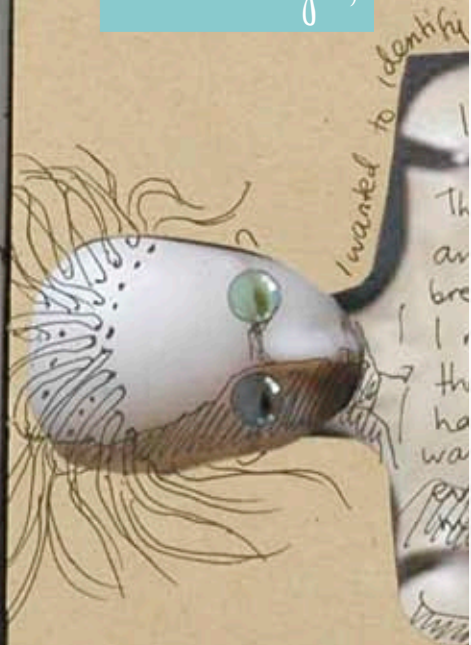
I was now the wife of a policeman, but I was still deeply troubled and unhappy and drank too much. I would disappear for days at a time and then turn up and not know where I'd been.

Rod wasn't physically violent in a day-to-day sense but in our ten years together there were six times when he just lost it and tried to kill me – with his hands. It was as if I tipped him right over the edge. He was also very controlling, including financially, and emotionally and verbally abusive. He was a gambler and I lived in denial about that for most of our life together. But I really cared about him. He was the best thing that had ever happened to me. He gave me security and stability, and because we moved a lot I also got change and didn't feel stuck.



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... first you learn to hate yourself, then you learn to hate others like you,



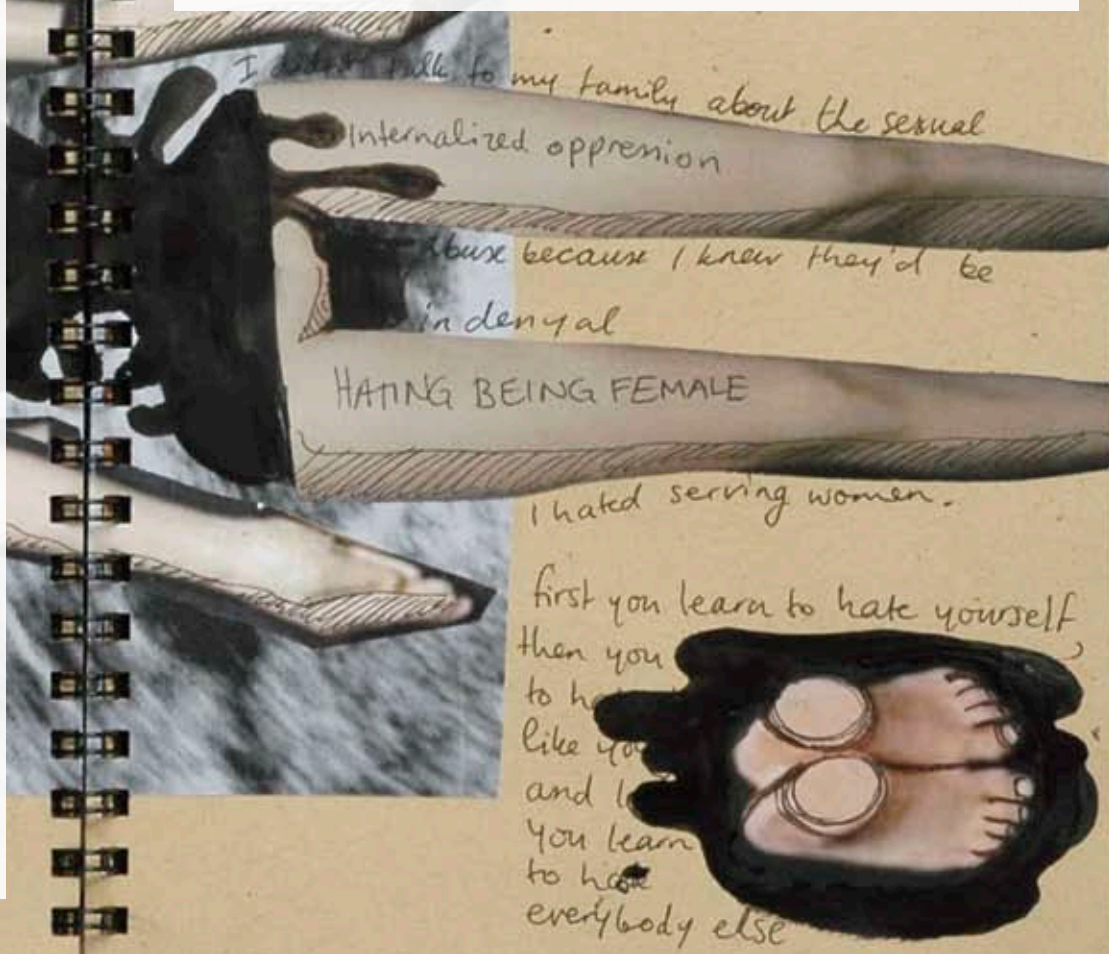
and lastly you learn to hate everybody else.

When he got his own police station, he was the boss and I was the boss's wife, and that's a certain role with expectations in a little country town. I was way out of my depth with that sort of expectation, and my reaction to it was to get sick. I now lost my second ovary. Then my womb was removed, and at one point my breasts started shrinking. I now see that this was around hating being female and wanting to get rid of the evidence – because then I might feel safe. I didn't understand it at the time, but even when I worked in a bar, I hated serving women. I only wanted to work in the public bar where the men were. I wanted to identify with men and be tough like them. I understand now that when you internalize oppression, first you learn to hate yourself, then you learn to hate others like you, and lastly you learn to hate everybody else.

I met a lovely woman, Jill, at the kindergarten. One day in front of me she gave her accountant a lecture about women's oppression. I'd never heard that term before, but I wanted to know about it. Through her I got into peer group counselling, and a women's book group. She chose *My Mother, Myself* by Nancy Friday. When I read it, I fell apart. I hadn't cried from the time my father had beaten me when I was 15, and now I was 26. I turned up on the doorstep of the woman who was teaching co-counselling, and I couldn't stop crying.

Reading that book was the beginning of my healing. It made me realise that I was never going to get what I needed from my mother. She was never going to put me first or protect me and look after me. I also remembered the rape that happened when I was pregnant. Up till then I had had no conscious memory of any sexual abuse, but now that part came back.

The first sexual abuse counselling centre in Western Australia had just opened and I booked to attend. The woman in charge worked with me every day, but I would leave feeling frustrated. Finally I wrote her a letter saying, "When I come into your room, I stop being me. It's as if I am five years old and I can't tell you what I want to tell you." So I wrote out what I needed her to know.



I was gradually remembering details about the rape, but I couldn't remember the man's face. When I finally could see it, my father's face was there as well. It was flashing – the rapist's face, my father's face, the rapist, my father. I was terrified, and so was the counsellor. Incest was never talked about then – only stranger rape.

Before I left the centre, I asked the counsellor what to do with the rage I felt about the rape and the way the police had treated me. She said to use the passion of my anger for change. I decided we needed a centre in our town – a women's refuge and domestic violence and sexual abuse centre, all in one. So that's where my passion went – into building a centre called Warratah. It has now been going for more than 20 years, and I go back regularly.

At the end of that year, 1979, I had a bad car accident. The car was smashed up like a piano accordion – and I was trapped in it. The ambulance officers were trying to cut me out when my husband arrived, and he saved my life because he knew the car, and how to get me out quickly.

I was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital because I'd lost so much blood. I could feel myself going towards the light. I didn't see anybody, but I could hear voices – and they were saying that I should

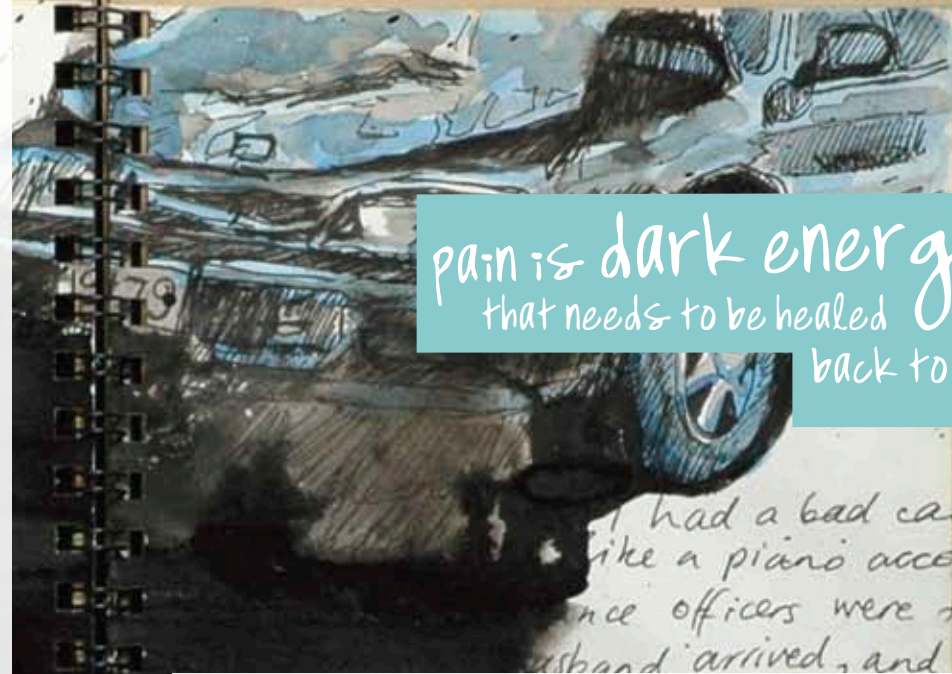
go back to life. I was thinking, "I don't want to go back. I've spent my whole life shattered on the inside, and now I'm shattered on the outside."

I thought that by staying dead, I'd be free of the pain, but these voices gave me the message that the pain would come with me and that it would also come back through my children – that you can't kill energy, you can only transform it, and that pain is dark energy that needs to be healed back to light.

I spent a year in hospital. It turned out that all my injuries were external. The framework that held me together was shattered, but no organs were affected. I couldn't move for the first six months, but I actively started my healing journey.

I realised that because of the unhealed abuse, I had set up my children for it. My daughter had been abused by my father – when I had left her with my father and gone shopping with my mother. The same thing had happened to my sister's children.

I didn't talk to my family about the sexual abuse because I knew they would all be in denial, but I did talk to my mother's sister. She told Mum what I'd told her, and Mum told me she couldn't believe me because that would mean she'd have to leave Dad. When I went on television and talked about incest, she thought that was unforgivable, and since then she has shut me out.



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I finally wrote to my brother telling him I remembered abuse happening to him. I never heard from him, but I found out later he'd spent the next two years telling doctors something was wrong with his throat. They finally found he had throat cancer, and he died. The memory I had was of him being orally raped.

Things really blew up in the family when I took my grandmother back to her home after my mother and her sister had put her in a nursing home. They had always said they would look after her, but when she had a stroke they put her in a home. They told me she had gone crazy, but she was very

angry about being put in a home, and frustrated that she couldn't say so because her speech had been impaired. She had been my lifeline as a child, so I became hers. I took her home, and kicked out the relatives who had moved in.

I believe we have elder abuse because we have child abuse. Our culture doesn't respect children and we are abusive towards them, and then as adults they get their own back on their parents and so the generational abuse continues. It is abuse – whether it is sexual, emotional, physical, financial or psychological. We continue to act it out one way or the other. I wanted to stop that in my family.

we have started to understand that the answer is in creating a violence-free society.



*My Mother / My Self*

er own mother left out so much. ...  
 om, fears she thought she had conqu...  
 ed. Now there is another person, not si...  
 er, but like her, and therefore subject to all...  
 thought all her life. The mother's progress in...  
 ty is halted. Ground gained that she could have...  
 andoned. She retreats and entrenches herself in the...  
 male stance of security and defense. The position...  
 ailed as mother protector. It is the position of fear. She...  
 only half alive but she is safe, and so is her daughter. ...  
 defines herself not as a woman but primarily as a moth...  
 left out, hidden from the girl who must never think of h...  
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 will be able to think of herself that way.

"I think what frightens me most is in daughter's...  
 ity," says a mother of a six-year-old. "It's own fear th...  
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Since coming to New Zealand in 1987, I have been working with domestic violence and sexual abuse, and it does feel to me as if we have started to understand that the answer is in creating a violence-free society. In the organisation I work with, Living Without Violence, we run groups for men and women who are perpetrators and victims, and for children.

This is tertiary intervention – the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. But funding is now coming through for primary intervention – to create violence-free environments. The National Network for Stopping Violence Services, to which we are affiliated, is now doing pilot studies in four different parts of the country.

The idea is to go into a high school, for example, and work with the staff, students and parents in a process where they come up with how they can create a violence-free environment. It's not a matter of going in with a programme, but of everyone involved coming up with a plan.

The ramifications go way past the high school environment – into the homes of the staff and students.

I feel very excited about this, because it is an indication that we are beginning to understand that family violence is not about individuals or even individual homes. It's about the whole of society.