

This Place is Yours is a not for profit media project. Our mission is to encourage storytelling as a way to get us to connect on a level that matters. thisplaceisyours.com

This publication was produced as a result of a successful crowd funding campaign that ran from June to September, 2012. You can check it out here: pozible.com/thisplaceisyours

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This publication contains stories about mental health issues and suicide and may trigger emotions in people with similar experiences. If this happens, please realise you are not alone. Please speak to your doctor, or visit lifeline.org.au. If you're in Australia, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

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This Place is Yours proudly supports green printing initiatives. We have chosen to work with Printgraphics, based in Mount Waverley, Victoria. They print 100% alcohol free under ISO 14001 Environmental Certification. They also have certification with ISO 9001, FSC, PEFC, ISO Colour Management and Sustainable Green Print. Our paper is Envirocare, which is 100% recycled and elemental chlorine free. All inks are vegetable based.

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Dearest readers,

First of all, thank you. For purchasing this book, for supporting this project, for believing in its mission. I can only hope you see the need for it as much as I do, but I also hope that you understand it less.

The birth of this project is a product of both hope and sorrow. Although it has come through me, it is not of me. It is not mine; it is yours.

All the themes within this project are connected to challenges I have been personally affected by, and the shame and secrecy that amplified the pain associated with them. In the house where I grew up, we weren't allowed to discuss our feelings. With no way to appropriately express our pain, it was thrown around like a game of catch. By the time I reached my 20s, I had no family to speak of, but I did have the burden of loss that only orphans know.

This loss permeated my life and it affected every one of my relationships, both big and small. It unlocked a dangerous level of ambition – there is no incentive greater than trying to get noticed by people who hurt you – and it warped my perception of who, exactly, was trustworthy.

Although massive episodes of depression became expected, a support system did not. Some of my closest friends dropped out of my life when my pain became too intense for them to be near, like a fire raging out of control. My survival was placed well and truly in my own hands.

This Place is Yours is an expression of my gratitude for this survival, something that I owe entirely to the art of story. It has provided me with connection to others going through similar challenges, it has enabled me to grow through some of my darkest moments, and, most of all, it has granted me with a vessel of deep self-love, which I truly see as the key to unlocking the solutions to some of our greatest challenges. Self-love comes through getting to know yourself, and there is no better way to know anyone than by hearing their story.

We are all impacted by the sting of emotional isolation and the stigma of vulnerability to varying degrees, and we will continue to be until we realise that our emotional experiences are not something we can – or should have to – silence any longer.

This Place is Yours is a space for you all to share your many stories of love, loss, passion, pain, hope, fear, and everything else within your human experience. I am confident that the act of storytelling, the sacred power of creativity and the potential of technology to connect us can move us towards a more compassionate, empathetic society. This project is part of a much larger movement towards emotional intelligence. Like the civil rights movement before it, one day I believe we will look back on the Before – now – and be grateful for how far we have come.

If you ever happen to have a conversation with me you will notice how I swiftly move past the shallow and into the deep and meaningful within a matter of minutes.

It's been a curse but also a blessing when people tell me they've never told anyone that before. And so when I began to compile this publication, I freaked out for a few minutes, but then I simply remembered all the stories I had been lucky enough to hear. I went back to these people and asked them to express themselves in words and imagery, the result of which you have in your hands right now.

I want to be very clear that although each piece is beautiful, This Place is Yours is not intended to be a talent pool. We are not based upon exceptionality, but rather, the art of expression. Everyone is creative and everyone has countless stories worth telling. We're not concerned with your achievements or your critical acclaim; we just want you to create and share, so that you can begin to accept and love yourself, and so that everyone who reads your story can see that they, too, are not alone.

This launch book is hopefully the start of many more publications to follow, because my goodness I could not fit in every story I wanted to. Thousands of books couldn't. But I hope this book inspires you to tell your story, to share it, and to realise that there is absolutely nothing unlovable about you.

Let's start connecting on a level that matters. Head to thisplaceisyours.com and be a part of this movement.

All my love,
Seraphina Reynolds

I am lucky enough to be able to pursue my ideas behind this project with a PhD through the Institute for Culture and Society at UWS and the Young and Well CRC. If you like, you can follow my research and thoughts at seraphinaswords.com.

COURAGE IS COOL

FLUTTER
LYON

G R O W I N G U P
(U P & A W A Y)



*We are born into this world without a compass to
navigate our existence, so our childhood and adolescence
are often spent in a perpetual state of confusion. We
play and we cry, we learn to love and we learn to fight.*

—

*What were your younger years like for you? How
did you become the person that you are today?*

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

A Girl in this World

Melanie Lee



As a child I experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. I felt as though I had no voice with which to speak of it and nowhere to turn. I felt vulnerable and alone, and vast amounts of time and space were filled imagining myself to be someone other than who I was.

Feelings of shame, unworthiness and being unlovable permeated every area of my life and were carried through my childhood into adulthood. My only means of defense was to shut down and avoid my reality wherever and however possible. I learned to escape into my imagination; in there I could create a totally different experience. It kept me alive at times and sustained me until I was able to get the help I needed to recover from the abuse and trauma.

The birth of my children was in many ways the rebirth of me. I fell completely in love with them, and in learning how to love and nurture them, I learned to love and care for myself. To me, the innocence of children is the epitome of bliss itself, and their trust is one of life's greatest gifts. It should be treasured and honoured.

Becoming a mother opened me up to myself more than any other experience. It brought all the parts within me that needed healing to the surface. It turned me inside out, upside down and right way up again. My children put me, and keep me, in touch with my own emotional landscape. Parenting them through every age and stage of their development has tugged upon every vulnerability I had as child. It continues to bring me face-to-face and heart-to-heart with my own issues, and challenges me to grow and heal in every area as I respond to their needs.

I cannot and have not been able to shield my children from experiencing pain and some of life's harsh realities, and that at times has been heartbreaking.

What I have chosen to do is take all of my experiences and learn from them, and to share the wisdom that comes from that. I have chosen to be honest and open in my life and with my children, to support and allow them to have a voice in every situation, and encourage it in every experience they face in the world.

I believe that our children come to us and through us into the world as their very own, once in a lifetime unique expression. I feel it's our responsibility to protect them from anything that stands in the way of them being who they are here to be, and creating what they are here to do.

It is true that whilst my life has been full of many painful experiences, it has also been full of overcoming them. Creativity has played a significant part in that. I lose and find and lose myself in creative expression almost daily. Whether it's writing, painting, illustrating or sharing stories, I seek creative ways to express and connect with myself and others. Through my creativity I have learned to tell my story. Through that journey, my book, *A Girl In The World*, came to life.

The freedom, creativity, love and nurturing I want for my own children, I want for every child. I hope to inspire children to understand that they are the heroes of their own lives.

agirlintheworld.org



Breaking Through to the Other Side

Ana Diaz

Each collection for my fashion label DIAZ is a journey that can be defined by a phrase or a word - something key to the time when it was being dreamed up. My first collection was safety: I was protected, able to be creative with no expectations. It was my first full-scale project and it didn't matter if it was 'successful' or not.

My second was focused on fear, and it wasn't until I was able to reflect on it that I was able to define it as such. Horror films, gore, drama... it may seem obvious to the outsider but to me, it wasn't as clear that the fear was within me. The follow up collection I started designing was my make or break, and where the concept reflected my subconscious.

State High was about growing up; that stage in life where you are not quite an adult, but no longer a child.

You try so many first things - cigarettes, drugs, alcohol - and also your first kiss, first love, first 'time'. Then there is the more sinister side, like being bullied, or feeling that very real teenage angst, where nobody understands you, or feeling as though you are all alone in a big world. Adolescence was all about try, learn, and repeat (sometimes skip the learn, and not think before trying).

I used to be scared of everything: walking in front of a group of people at the train station; being the only one to get off the bus at a stop; making a phone call to someone I didn't know well; speaking up in conversations anywhere, anytime, and in any social situation, because what I said would probably embarrass me beyond belief.

Quite often after I would say a few words, I'd sit there for the rest of the evening, agonising over how I could have said things differently. This meant I never stood up for what I believed in, and being an entrepreneur in a creative field, I knew this was something I had to learn to do.

Designing this collection was symbolic of my headspace at the time. I went through six months of therapy (which was pretty much my best ever life decision), where I learned how to leave these demons behind and who I really was (because truly, I had no idea a year ago). I also experienced a time in my life I was sure everyone else had already had, where I learnt to be confident, proud, and happy with myself. I delved to the core of what was really important to me, what I valued over everything, and most of all, I learnt that it was okay to be me. I learnt how to let go of the fear and insecurities I have always had.

For the first time ever in my life, I have confidence in my work and in myself, and I no longer agonise over what people think of me. It is amazing and intoxicating, and I highly recommend it!

I can't remember when I started calling State High my "coming-of-age collection", but it was. Not just for DIAZ, but for myself. I believe DIAZ is bigger than me and it has always been such an amazing vehicle for me to express myself. For that I am so grateful.

diazlabel.com



OPΓA3M
ORGASMUS
ORGASME
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⊕RGASM

FLUTTER WHISPERS

Sexual Living

Giverny Lewis

Despite talking about sex for a living, I’ve never shared my own masturbation story before. It’s a private awkwardness that many women (including myself) have experienced. One which, if shared, denounces us as abnormal, damaged and dirty – the very feelings that perpetuate the pervasive shame around female sexuality. This shame creates and contributes to sexual dysfunction, orgasmic disorders, low self-esteem, depression, relationship breakdown and victim blaming. With that in mind, I’ll swallow my pride, plunge my hands into my pants and recall my clistory (clit history).

I was around eight or nine. My brother was given a drum kit for his twelfth birthday and to remain on speaking terms with the neighbours, my parents renovated and soundproofed our downstairs rumpus room. There was a lounge down there with soft arms that I used to sit on sometimes when we were watching TV. While straddling one of the arms one day I noticed how it felt nice to rub up against them. The next day when I was alone, I went downstairs, turned on the TV and straddled the lounge. I rubbed against it until I felt a strange warmth and satisfaction in my pelvis (of course I didn’t know at this point that it was my wonderful little clitoris saying “me gusta”, and I had probably just had my first orgasm).

I stopped, dismounted the lounge and suddenly felt incredibly guilty and embarrassed. What had I just done? I felt it was wrong and taboo in some way. I felt like a rabid dog that had just had their way with a stuffed toy (and we all know how distressing that can be for everyone involved...). I didn’t tell anyone. I’d never been taught anything about this – not from school, my parents or TV.

After feeling so guilty, I tried to put it out of my mind for a long time.

But I couldn’t. I snuck downstairs every week or so, and soon I was rubbing myself against my pillow in bed to reach orgasm. There was no ‘aha!’ moment, but soon I realised that something that felt so good had to be okay. I wasn’t hurting anyone; it was just me and my body, enjoying each other.

Since then, my masturbation has had peaks and troughs. It’s a comfort when I’m depressed, a tonic when I’m lonely, and a quick-fix solution when I’m horny. I’ve graduated from pillows & lounges to vibrators & fingers (always with plenty of lube, of course). Sometimes I watch porn, other times I just use my imagination or think about a recent experience with a partner. Over the years I realised the importance of masturbation to discover what feels good and works for you, before trying to achieve this with a partner. You need a tried and true orgasm recipe before you can reliably cum with your man/lady/lover/special friend/fuck-buddy/hook-up/random in the street.

Since my Masters in Sexual Health, many of my conversations with friends have inevitably turned to sex and sexuality. They’re a bunch of deliciously proud hussies! However, masturbation is rarely mentioned (amongst my female friends, at least). Women often don’t feel entitled or deserving of pleasure, a space to indulge, or even time to themselves, and that’s why I’ve started buying vibrators for my friends’ birthdays. Because it’s time for us to put down our phones, babies, dishes, laptops, paperwork & yoga mats, and take orgasmic matters into our own hands, literally. We’ve earned it.

notestovirgins.blogspot.com.au

artwork: Flutter Lyon



Broken Bodies to Breaking Cycles

Amanda Ryan

This is a story of a little girl who lost her way from the most sacred part of her being, only to once again find it transformed into the most beautiful thing she could have never seen before.

This is my story.

When I was 15, I had my virginity taken from me by a boy who didn't understand or have the ability to control his urges. Having no idea how to deal with this event at the time and feeling unsafe and ashamed to talk to anyone about it, I denied its existence and moved on.

When I was 19, I was diagnosed with cervical cancer. I believe it was no coincidence that I became sick in that place of my body. I had held onto emotion from this part of my body so tight without acknowledgement that it was only natural it would surface somehow.

I needed two operations to remove the cancerous cells and with these new wounds, old wounds were reopened and a chance for healing revealed itself.

I cried for a week, non-stop. I then spoke to some close friends and my parents about my abuse. I believed I was now fixed, that book was closed, and I could move on.

In another five years time and exactly 10 years after the event, I was on one of my regular trips to Bangladesh working with women and children living in slums with my social enterprise Bachhara, when my pain and unresolved feelings reared their ugly head.

I was faced again with this story, except this time, I was the adult. I was the adult who was expected to 'know' what to do when a young girl needed my help, my wisdom and my love.

I felt sick to stomach, not just because of what it personally brought up for me, but because I had grown up. Now I was considered an adult. And I had no fucking idea what to do.

As I discussed the issue in hushed voices with three other women (who also happened to be sexual abuse victims), I realised that I was part of a very strong recurring cycle.

I was certainly not the first woman who had suffered abuse, nor it seemed would I be the last. Women have been suffering for thousands of years, and what was becoming obvious to me, was that most of us were suffering silently.

This moment of clarity was what I really needed to take my experience and move it to the next stage of its story: a place of growth and change, not just a place of acceptance and apathy.

I may not have had the courage to act purely for my own liberation but I certainly had the drive to do it for my future daughter, her daughter and the many women in the world who will be wounded by acts of rape or abuse in their lifetime.

I did not want to see another young girl deal with the shame, the guilt and the blame alone like I did. I did not want to see another girl disrespect herself and her body for the next ten years of her life because she felt damaged with no right to say no.

I decided the best way for me to break my own cycle was to go public with my story. If we continue to not talk about this issue because it is uncomfortable it will continue on as it always has, perhaps with new faces and new situations, but the pain will be just the same.

My blog went from a few readers to hundreds overnight. I had ignited something in myself and obviously something in others. I had women write to me about their stories and thank me for also giving them the permission to speak out and break their cocoon of shame and pain. Once I realised I could use my pain and experience to liberate others, the world became that little bit lighter and I breathed just that little deeper.

What was a painful experience and a time of feeling alone and separated, has now transformed into one of the most healing and connected parts of my life.

I work with amazing women everyday and my passion to liberate women's bodies and spirits has become an integral part of my work. Within the next year I will be launching a foundation dedicated to honour the feminine and the sacredness of a woman's body. Women's bodies give life to both men and women, and the fact that we live in a world where that sacredness is compromised is a sad thing.

I now believe I possess the most precious jewel on this earth, and I will guard that jewel with the courage of a lioness and nurture it as if I am a great goddess.

My journey through my pain has been the most important journey of my life so far. I hope that by sharing my story, others who have also experienced pain and suffering can transform that pain, escape the victimhood and create something beautiful out of something ugly. When we break, we are given the most amazing opportunity to put things back together, and they can become even more amazing than they were before.

bachhara.com

The Allowance of Freedom

Flutter Lyon

From the ages of 0 – 27, I was straight like an arrow, with no idea that I could be anything other than heterosexual.

By the age of 27, I was gay.

I was wonderfully, beautifully, freely opening up my identity and character to explore a realm I hadn't previously known I was allowed to enter. It took some time for the dust to settle but essentially, I knew I was finally becoming something I'd wanted to be for a very long time – I'd just never been able to define what that was, until the time came.

My first major relationship lasted for seven years, with an amazing man whom I was deeply in love with. We shared an intimate intellectual bond and affectionate physical attraction, and built a life and a home together. The only thing was, I never really wanted to sleep with him. I thought there was something wrong with me – that I had some kind of sexual defect. I didn't consider that I could perhaps be deeply attracted to someone intellectually and yet they might not be the person I should be with romantically.

I was on a focused mission to create the life I imagined – to build what I had missed out on in my own childhood, coming from a divorced and unstable family environment.

I was determined to make my family proud – to go out into the world and develop a career, a relationship and a lifestyle embedded in solid ethics, principles and level of esteem. My rudder was pointed in the direction of what I should do, not really at what I wanted to do.

At the age of 25, the relationship ended.

For the next couple years I went on a journey of romantic and sexual exploration and dated a range of men from very different backgrounds. It was a rich and valuable journey, and enabled me to see more of myself.

But one thing I realised was that I was still being driven by a desire to achieve, to win at life, to make something work with a man – to tick the relationships area off my list of achievements. I didn't know that I was allowed to just be and organically let my true self show over time.

When I started working somewhere where the majority of the clientele were gay, I was suddenly amongst the magical world of lesbian women and queer thinking that I had always admired and been fascinated by, yet felt I didn't have a way in nor the courage to find one.

I was suddenly exposed to a community of people who approached life from a different perspective to what I was used to – who had lived as part of a minority group for much of their lives, who were attracted to women and went out with women, who shared stories of love and loss, who exuded a sense of self-acceptance I could only dream of.

It was great, it was fun, it was new, it was incredibly attractive. I felt myself reflected in the people around me. At first, it wasn't necessarily homosexuality, but an exploration of self and a look at the experience of desire on a deeply personal, sensual and sexual level. I began to open my mind, to allow myself to be amongst this environment and its principles.

I then developed a serious crush on a woman who came in regularly. I would think about her day and night. I could hardly speak when she was around; my attraction to her was that palpable. It made me feel alive and sexual and powerful. It was an experience unlike any attraction I had had before.

I tried to fight it. I couldn't just become gay because everyone around me was – that would have been ridiculous! I thought maybe I was just being 'an artist' and exploring something that seemed edgy.

I didn't take myself seriously at first. But then I stopped telling myself what to do.

I'd never thought I was 'allowed' to be homosexual. I was a girl from the western suburbs of Sydney who had had absolutely no exposure to gay culture and I had never been encouraged to explore nor enjoy my sexuality.

I started to consider the concept of being gay, gently and quietly and very personally. Something inside me was saying that there was a big message and moment of evolution being presented to me. I simply let myself think and feel, with as few judgments or expectations as possible.

I spent the next two years coming out: to myself, and then to others.

During that time, I enjoyed an incredibly powerful relationship with a transman with whom I learnt more about the world of transgender and queer thinking. The experience connected to my personal principles of courage and personal freedom and identity and self-acceptance. I felt like I'd come home. I felt like I fitted in, finally.

I realised more and more that I was attracted to women: to beautiful, powerful, loving, intelligent, creative women.

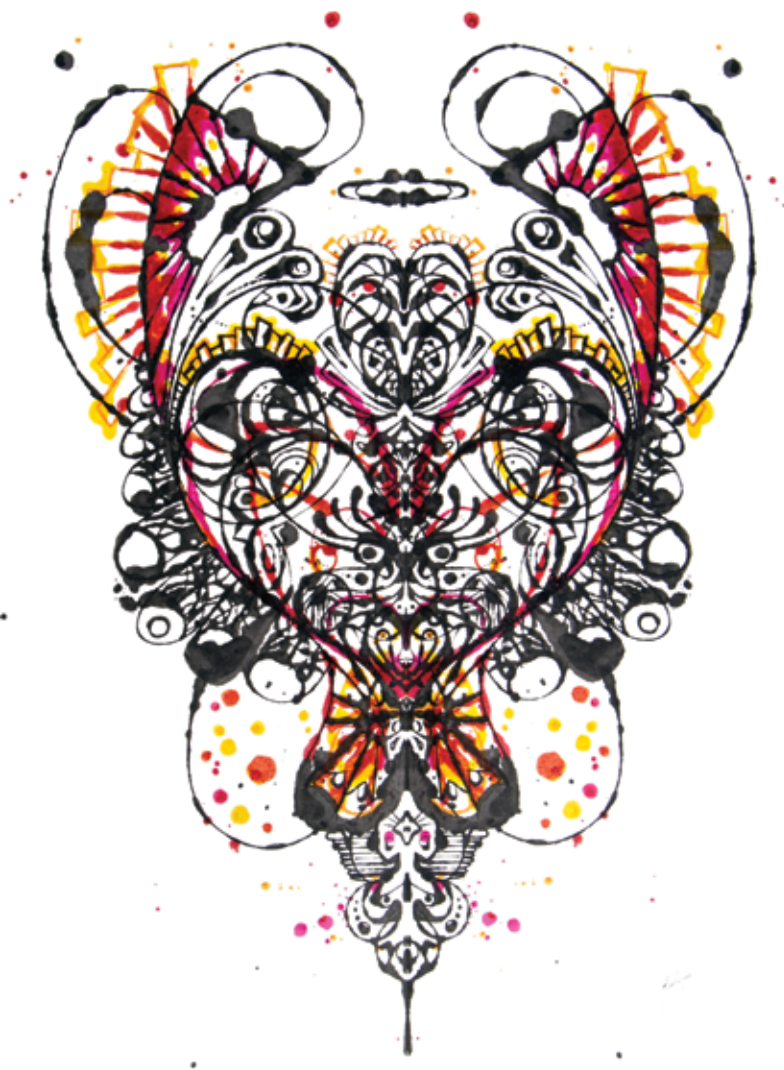
At the age of 29, I am enjoying a beautiful relationship with a woman I have been fascinated by and deeply attracted to for five years. Until now, I just didn't know I was allowed to do anything about it. She's had a crush on me too, so it's a lovely little experience of serendipity. We're getting to know each other on a level that is found when two hearts collide at the right times in their lives and allow themselves to open up.

Being gay is the most natural and normal and real experience I've had the privilege to find. If I hadn't gone on this journey of self-awareness, I would never have known how 'me' I was able to be.

I have become far more loving, caring, accepting, compassionate and respectful because of my experience. My empathy for fellow human beings has found a wonderful depth and breadth. We are all complex and multi-layered – we come into life from many different directions and angles – and every one of those angles has value and beauty.

There is more for all of us waiting out there and in here. Our courage and openness will take us there; we just have to be ready to go.

flutterlyon.com



'This Is What I See In You'

For an ex-lover, a young doctor from London, a woman I loved and I saw much greatness inside of. I created this as a parting gift for her.



'Open and Honest (Getting High On Your Own Supply)'

This piece represents becoming more honest about my personal experiences with mental health, sobriety, love and life, and finding new ways to 'get high.'

L I V I N G & F E E L I N G



Living and feeling are one in the same, yet all too often we do not know how to cope with the latter. If we can learn to express our emotions and most especially our pain, we can release the ghosts that haunt us and start to heal.

—

There are myriad flavours of pain. What are yours?

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

The Healing Labyrinth

Charlotte Claire

I have a regret I can't shake: in a fit of catharsis I threw away all the journals documenting my depressive spells. Buried in those Dear Diaries were my conversations with suicide, acres of melancholic insight, a language for loneliness, uncontrived, and the seductions of my black smok'n affair with self-sabotage.

I know why I turfed them; I was taking a symbolic leap of moving forward because that is what you do to disengage depressive spells. You're in a constant tug-of-war with your moving backward and the racing forward of a society whose speed you cannot match. Today, having moved forward ten years from the slowest legs of my steepest depression, I regret my sudden impulse to spring-clean.

Regardless, my depressing story is etched in my psyche like an epic legend. Set in my adolescence, it narrates the many ways I self-destructed as a response to trauma. Animated, albeit gloomily, through my contemplative personality, I wrote meditations on a fractured childhood spiraling towards a future of buried rage. Those pages argued valid reasons for leaving the planet early and were fit for a manifesto sans inspiration. My lone movement marched through the underworld, forging my psychological history with a morbid revolt. Those journals should be treasured beside my diaries of foreign sojourns, romantic ruminations and moon-time musings.

They were scriptures from the brink of despair; vignettes of human vices beyond compare.

Are they not remnants of pain that we solitarily traverse? Basic storytelling before it becomes pretty verse? Indeed, they are evidence of the power of writing, fighting and re-igniting that dismal, depressing flame, burning blue.

Stories, synchronicity, kindred souls and community illuminate signposts in our Labyrinth of Wellbeing. We sit at the core of its loops and laneways, seeking inspiration, education and validation from the outside world, yet our choices, our knowing and our rise beckon from within. We need a mental health care system that embraces the human experience as labyrinthine, creative, unpredictable and intuitive, NOT a systematic science that compartmentalises our instinctive nature.

These days I pitch myself as mentally delicate yet strong, physically able and wide awake with a spirit of fire devoted to improving mental health care. I'm a blessed young woman with a colourful life and tremendous respect for the difficult places we visit privately and that remain unspoken. My fear of moving backward again is tempered by a deep trust in the commitment from my soul to ask for help when I need it. Having hacked, hunted and prayed my way through crippling states of consciousness, I'm determined to ensure these states are more widely supported. Why can't we talk openly about suicide? Why can't we create sanctuaries of support that offer time, space, presence and transformative opportunities, without diagnostic checklists, drug experiments and shame? What's wrong with not coping – be it anxiously or hysterically? Is it not fact, that as we constantly evolve we must conquer our greatest challenges? Ain't that why we have each other?

Gained I certainly have from surviving suicide, private violence and an all-round negative mindset. These experiences are my honest experience of being human. While I may have endured trauma, I got nowhere in denial of my depressions and her many faces.

The day I took ownership for my own mental health and wellbeing, my epic, labyrinthine legend took a twist of unrivaled triumph! I churned through pages of despair, writing myself towards freedom.

I became an intrepid explorer of terrain other than psychiatry. I sought answers to existential questions beyond CBT and group therapy. I indulged in dance instead of psychoanalytical review. I gave my body nourishment through nutrition, life modelling, yoga and ritualistic care. I resuscitated my weary soul with appreciations of the sacred.

I dedicate my writing, life modelling, existential research and activist spirit to prising open people's closed thinking about psychological, emotional and spiritual challenges. My social activist project, The Babyfacedassassin, breathes life back into the uninspiring, pathological framework within which we view mental health; a framework long overdue for a revolution! I vote for Self-Love, Self-Compassion and Self-Empowerment! Being diagnosed 'mentally ill' can breed a mentality of victimhood and limitation, and neglects the gifts of the body and spirit in the face of psychological despair. It's time we took a different tone with our differences.

The Babyfacedassassin embraces the multi-faceted nature of being human and advocates for the Creative, Embodiment and Sacred Arts as the leading paradigms in mental health care, with psychiatry as a complimentary alternative that is useful during crises.

While I live with the regret of discarding my own depressive voice on paper, I am filled with the greatest lesson of my life: to never deny that voice a place or space to sing, if only a whisper, for it is a voice of profound messages that humanity can no longer hide.

thebabyfacedassassin.com
photograph: Pauline Langmead



Anniversary No.5

Alain Khouri

It's five years since you fell out of my life,
tragically,
and out of your own.
I don't know which Gemini twin leapt that day,
but both died,
the one I knew,
and the one hidden in the secrets of your mind.
It is horrific to contemplate that you did this deliberately,
that the look you gave me was defiance
as you somersaulted over the rail.
I heard your cry of fright when I screamed your name,
and watched you fall through the camellia leaves.
I found the notes you left,
the scribbled words 'cremation' and 'Greece',
the farewell to your father,
the music for your funeral,
and the pill you didn't take.
I scattered your ashes on Rhodes,
at sunset,
from a derelict castle,
with wild thyme in the air and pain in my heart,
sending you on the greatest journey of all
and leaving for me a melancholy that is your testament.

It's five years since you fell from the balcony.
Your death was unexpected,
as instant as thought that doesn't exist until it occurs.
You split my mind when you split your skull,
and cracked my personality.
You broke every bone in your body.
You sapped my spirit and broke every truth I knew.
Now, I twist logic
to create a balance in my mind.
If I teeter on a truth that is too steep,
I reduce the incline so that the step is not too great.

It's five years since you went away,
five years of tears and bewilderment,
and adjustment of who am I.
I wonder why life is,
and what it means,
as I travel toward the light that you have found.

alainkhouri.blogspot.com.au

A Journey Through Loss

Monica Zwolsman

I am still standing – even though I have wanted the world to go away many, many times in the last twenty years.

To put my personal story of tragedy in a paragraph, I have been widowed twice, and my 15-month old son died after a small operation. I am now undergoing a bitter and traumatic divorce to Husband Number Three. On top of all that, I am turning 50 at the end of this year. After surviving REAL tragedies, perhaps vanity might be the death of me.

To colour the picture in a little for you, my first husband – the first love of my life – was award-winning photographer Ken Oosterbroek, who was shot dead just before the first free and fair South African elections. He was caught in the crossfire between warring factions in a township near Johannesburg, after which I seriously lost the plot and spent a few months hiding in a cupboard, taking handfuls of powerful sleeping tablets so I didn't have to cope with the loss. Was it exacerbated by the fact I already struggle with depression?

Did I suffer also from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, considering that as a hard-news journalist I had seen so many people shot dead, kids brutalised, animals left maimed and whimpering and other such atrocities in Africa? Maybe my craziness was a culmination of factors.

Marriage Two was with another photographer, Steven Hilton-Barber, and I absolutely loved this incredibly wild and woolly man. Life continued its manic rollercoaster ride with the two of us flying from one mad adventure to another. Eight years later, we went on to have our darling son, Benjamin. But my soul mate and fellow adventurer Steven, died from heart attack when Benjal was only five months old. It was only my love for my gorgeous son that kept me upright and moving forward. But then, Benjamin too died. He had a minor operation and due to confusion with medication, he went into a coma and passed away. Even writing this now makes tears fall – and it is ten years ago.

That had to be the most life-threatening period of my life. I think the horror of it was so extreme that my mind blanked it out. I have no idea how the body survives such pain. So, there I was, now 40 years old, a widow with a dead son. I could not imagine the agony of having to continue living. The hideousness of the excruciating pain that awaited me was truly terrifying. I begged people to put me out of my misery, like a dog.

As any of you who have experienced profound shock and anguish may understand, the body responds by shutting down. In my case, my ears start to ring, and naturally produced chemicals flood my body so I feel wrapped in a foggy cottonwood headspace where I can't think, feel or make sense of anything. I am unable to recognise people, remember even basic stuff and life becomes a blur. But when that chemical starts to wear off and reality sets in, the intensity of the pain is truly unbearable. Fortunately, just a flash of reality soon forces my brain to shut right back off again. So I handle pain in micro pieces, taking it out over the years bit by bit until I learn to live alongside it.

My other method of survival is to take to the road and run – both literally and figuratively. I avoid thinking of the past and move right on forward – move city, move country, leave job, ditch all belongings, start life again from scratch – with as much bustle and frenetic activity as possible.

To lose a beloved husband for me was heart breaking, and both times, I felt all my hopes and dreams had been swept away, leaving me completely at a loss. So I concentrated all my time and energy into finding a new life. But after Benjamin died, it was like comparing stubbing toes with being stabbed in the eyes repeatedly, day in and day out.

But my survival instinct kicked in. I left South Africa and ended up in Australia.

I hurriedly found a tall man, had two children with him, and basically set myself up in the so-called Lucky Country where I tried to have a happily-ever-after.

I chose Husband Three in haste when I was mentally in no state to be making those kinds of decisions. We never connected, yet when our marriage eventually could limp along no longer, I was beyond devastated. I felt so betrayed and let down with life, that I was unable to achieve my hearts' desire – a family with the father of my children in a little picket fence in suburbia. My lifelong dream was now really and truly over.

For a few years before our end, I became increasingly depressed and suicidal. After separation, I thought vaguely and talked wildly of killing my kids and myself – as there was no way I would leave them to cope in a world without me. Of course, nobody took me seriously and certainly Husband Three wasn't too bothered. But I know it could have happened. I don't think my taking that step was that improbable. I am absolutely over that stage now, but I do find myself sinking these days into depths of despair I never fell to before. Shutting down and moving on through various tragedies helped me survive, but after the separation, the accumulation of sadness caught up with me.

I now often feel my face grimacing with bitter madness and anger. My heart feels twisted and heavy. I feel like a fat and ugly victim.

Worst of all, I seem to have lost faith in the possibility of joy. With Ken and Steven, and even after Benjamin died, there was a glowing ember of excited anticipation waiting to be flamed back into life. Ten years ago, everything was still a possibility.

Life still held promise of beauty. But recently, I have felt broken and tired, and often incredibly lonely and afraid. I have felt hopeless.

My true journey of healing and recovery probably begins now. I am on my own for the first time in my life. I went from being in my dad's care to husband to husband to husband, and I was young enough for others to step in and care for me. But I am nearly 50-bloody-years-old now. People expect me to take charge of my own life. So I need to find my own groove.

I realise this is a remarkably brief and rather factual and wooden account, touching on various aspects on my life. I wish to spare readers of my drama and pathos – and also not expose myself too fully. I write this in the hopes that anyone else out there might find something to cling onto in their own journey, if only the fact that they are not alone in being singled out for a ride on the mental Pain Train.

So I write sometimes. I run in the nearby forest often. I am currently doing a major detox. I surround myself with my lovely girlfriends. I think about how to shape up. And I am giving thought to my future, to clearing the jungle of my mind, so that hope and happiness may someday return.

beauteouslife.wordpress.com

We Lost Track of Time

Jodee Knowles



I was dead for two years. I created this work when I was dead. The only way I could feel alive was by drawing at this time, and knowing that my emotions would be evident in the finished works. This piece was the most potent.

jodeeknowles.com

I incorporate symbols of death throughout my work because I think it is important to identify with the fact that we are mortal creatures. I believe if we can accept our own mortality, we can in turn appreciate the significance of life.

As a strict vegetarian, I consider my taxidermy to be a celebration of life and a preservation of something beautiful. I feel strongly about the fair and just treatment of animals, and I use only animals that have died of natural causes.

discemori.com

Sentience

Julia deVille



My Cartoon World

Amani Omejer

As a kid, I would daydream for it all to just disappear... for me to just disappear. As an adult, during any moment of overwhelm, isolation or strife, this familiar longing for it all to end became a best friend. Then, on a beautiful day in April 2012, at age 24, these thoughts, which had been there in some way all those years, became all encompassing, and I attempted suicide.

The bag of post-overdose emotions has been an intense and mixed up one. Tears of relief, gut punches of regret, the ten-ton weight of shame and embarrassment, a blinding angst about the road ahead, heart wrenching isolation, and self-hatred's crippling nausea have all shown their painful face.

Questions of my deservability, lovability, and general ability in this life, because of what I did, have been annoyingly, and depressingly, present as well.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be able to draw cartoons. Little did I know that learning to draw them would become a lifeline in balancing out the inner backchat that followed my overdose.

They have enabled me to get to know my cast of doubting characters, whilst also developing and integrating voices of gentleness and compassion. Each sketch has brought comedy and lightness to voices that once only demoralised and judged, creating a distance between me and them that was never there before.

The self that now speaks up to offer reassurance and unconditional compassion gives me faith that despite the fact my Critic won't just disappear, I can begin to live a life that isn't ruled by his deflating and undermining chatter.

Overdosing wiped clean any inch of self-trust that had been there before. This seed took a long time to be planted again, but all the hours spent doodling out cartoons of my inner dialogue have cradled it and let it grow. For the first time since the overdose eleven months ago, I can now say that this bud of self-trust is beginning to blossom. And in ways it never did before.





I was reborn that day, that's for sure. Over these months, I have grown in ways that I would never have previously imagined. Looking back over my sketchbooks, my heart fills with pride and tears fill my eyes for all that I have navigated through, all that I have learnt, and the way I am getting to know the whole of me. As a result, another bud that is beginning to blossom is the one of self-love. And it is growing in a way that I would have never previously thought possible, either. It turns out this is the bud that heals.

The aftermath of my overdose brought my PTSD, which had begun to surface during the months before, to a blinding level. For me, PTSD has been about getting to know myself in the most uncomfortable, unfamiliar and unwanted states. These states sweep the grains of foundation from beneath me and strip away the trust in my sanity. My identity becomes a jumbled mess of anxiety and haunting memories. Finding my feet becomes impossible. However, with nature and creativity as my main resources, these feet have gradually become more easily able to be found.

Nature is unconditionally there. It offers solace and stability, connection and nurturance. It is where I go to feel held. By taking time each day to connect to the earth, be it a tree in the backyard or a whole wood full of them, I find purpose and belonging; two things that have been crucial during this time of healing, along with the fun and adventure that naturally comes with them.

I can safely say that my connection with nature has saved my life on more than one occasion. It is what got me through my childhood and teenage years, and it is what continues to get me through this perplexing time.

The PTSD has always felt almost impossible to articulate, but using cartoons to express it does so perfectly. My iPad is always with me in my bag, to help in any moment of angst or panic. Despite how terrifying it is, I have learnt to find my PTSD hilarious too. The way I have spent hours or days completely stuck in the past, completely convinced that the overdose or another trauma is going to happen again. I believe it with every bone in my body, yet I get to the end of the day, look back and laugh – because, yet again, it hasn't. And yet again, I am okay.

The moment I woke up in that hospital bed, I knew everything was different...I was different. I am starting to give my long history of emotional and physical abuse and childhood responsibility the voice it deserves, and needs, in order to heal. The event that was intended to bring my journey to an end actually kick-started it in ways I could never have imagined. The pain is isolating, seemingly endless, and heartbreakingly intense, but the joy and clarity that follow these crumbling states is worth every tear.

metaphoricalmarathons.com

Poetic Justice

Leah Thorn

in a naked state
the women who name
those women have to be contained
those women who disclose, expose
those who show, too eager to show
show scars, who hurting
hurt others
take them, scapegoat,
away
Leah

I am a spoken word poet and for almost ten years, I have run poetry workshops in prisons across England for the Anne Frank Trust. For two of those years, I was poet-in-residence in a women's prison.

Women are a small and often ignored minority of the overall prison population, just 4.8% in England and Wales. However, the impact of their incarceration is enormous. The social conditions that fuel women's routes into prison, such as poverty, isolation, harassment and abuse (along with emotions that justifiably arise from those conditions, such as rage, anxiety, mistrust, fear, indifference) are often intensified by the experience of imprisonment. Those leaving prison often go back to the same conditions, with the same challenges as when they entered.

During my residency, I ran groups, worked with individuals, organised performances, and compiled and edited publications. One such publication, *Release*, is a book by and for women in prison who self-harm. I am committed to enabling incarcerated women's voices to be heard. The book contains powerful stories and poems, such as 'Universal Woman':

Universal Woman

A woman's pain is universal.

A woman's tears are global.

We love the same. We cry the same.

We lose the same. We all settle for less of the same.

We dream the same. We mean the same.

We need the same and want the same.

No matter the cost, no matter the loss.

We prostitute our minds.

Sell our emotions short. Sometimes at no price at all.

We lay down and sell our very souls.

We kneel and bargain with our enemies.

We hurt the same. We bleed the same.

We fight the same battles.

Hidin' the same scars, pickin' at the same scabs,
whisperin' the same mantras.

We laugh the same, though the
sadness never leaves our eyes.

We make the same promises,
that we spend our whole lives tryin' to keep.

We stand accused by others.

We lie the same, tellin' tall tales that never age.

We trust the same, fallin' prey as
victims of abuse and misuse.

We fall prey to vicious addictions and
afflictions. It's all the same.

We are all the same. Our struggle
to survive is the same.

Universal

Star

Poetry seems to have a particular attraction and meaning for women who may be vulnerable and marginalised within a criminal justice system designed for men. They may have had the reality of their life experiences denied or ignored, and writing poetry can be a way for them to put the record straight and take charge of their lives. Many who would not ordinarily ask for help frequently write out their pain in the form of a poem. Poetry can empower women to articulate long-suppressed emotions and clarify thoughts and feelings, which in turn equips them to deal with a world over which they have little control. It can help them reach out and feel less alone. The act of writing poetry may be an individual endeavour, but the sharing of the poetry can help build communication and peer support networks amongst incarcerated women.

I go into prison with six decades of life experience. One crucial identity I carry is that of being a daughter of a Holocaust survivor, and many of my strengths (and unfortunately, challenges) as an arts-in-prison facilitator derive from this identity.

I started working in a women's prison just after my mother died. I could not have managed to be a support/facilitator for women in prison AND my mother, as she demanded a lot of me. After her death, it was as if I transferred my skills of calmness in the midst of chaos to the prison setting. In my family, I learnt early on that it did not work well for several people to panic at the same time, so I taught myself to be (outwardly) relaxed and comforting when my parents panicked, to become that calming influence, a benign contradiction to raging terror and grief. This is an invaluable skill in prison.

I can't bear to see the intense pain of another person, yet I am drawn to it - a kind of 'Horror by Proxy'. Working in prison means coming face to face with all that is wrong in the world, and just how wrong it is. I want to 'fix things' (tikkun olam) with all that comes with it - the honour, the urgency and the agony of seeing suffering up-close, stark, stripped bare.

lealthorn.com

topdocumentaryfilms.com/beautiful-sentence

K N O W I N G
O N E A N O T H E R



For beauty and for sorrow, we are all connected to one another. Our lives are shaped by the relationships we carry through them, and by far our most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves.

—

What have the people in your life taught you about love, pain, humanity, and the essence of who you are?

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

A Return to Happiness

Nathan Oldfield

In lots of ways, I think my new film, *The Heart & The Sea*, moves forward from where my last film, *Seaworthy*, concluded. *Seaworthy* explored some difficult themes: the personal tragedy of losing our daughter Willow and learning to grow through the grief and despair that followed. By the end of the film, it was a kind of return to joy. *The Heart & The Sea* takes that feeling further – that sense of new hope and gratitude for the gift of being alive.

When I'd finished watching *Seaworthy* for the first time with my good friend, Tom, he told me that he was proud of me that I took that film to such a personal and vulnerable place of brokenheartedness.

But in the same conversation, he predicted that the next film I would make would be all about joy. I'm happy to say that Tom was right.

The film is called *The Heart & The Sea* because it celebrates the richest gifts of a surfing life: healthy relationships with family and friends and a shared intimacy we have with the sea and each other through surfing. Joy and thankfulness are really what the film is all about.

nathanoldfield.com







On Parenthood

Damon Williams





Making Matches

Matt Granfield & Rebecca Granfield

Matt

I wasn't looking for a soul mate when Rebecca messaged me out of the blue one night on Twitter. She liked my beard, thought my writing was entertaining, and proposed marriage.

As a perpetual and serial monogamist, I'd only had one proper year of being single since I was 16, and much of that was spent desperately trying to convince an ex-girlfriend to get back together with me. On the night of Bec's Tweet, I was about three weeks out of another not particularly inspiring nine-month relationship and was mostly dreading, but at least a little tantalised by, the prospect of putting half-eaten containers of two-person meals in the fridge.

Being single could be fun, I told myself in my gloom. Having leap-frogged from girlfriend to girlfriend for more than a decade, with only meagre breaks in between, chasing tails was a sporadic thrill I'd barely had the time to get used to. As long as I wasn't single forever, I was well prepared to ignore the cat and go out into the world to seek my fortune.

But on that night, fortune sought me.

My soul mate tweeted me on Sunday night. We chatted until Tuesday. I asked her out on Wednesday. We had the most romantic, most spectacular date on Saturday night – sometime around nine we realised we liked all the same things. ALL the same things. Sometime around 10 we had gelato and realised we liked all the same songs. Sometime around 11 I convinced her to come back to my place, at which point she told me that under no circumstances was I getting sex. She left at 3am. We had another date on Wednesday night. We made plans to see each other again on the Friday.

That was 18 months ago.

We haven't been apart since.

Bec

This is supposed to be a story of how we met, and the story of us falling in love. We met over Twitter. We fell in love through laughing, kindness, and patience.

As I write, he's preparing a zucchini cheesecake, because that's what I want.

The man exercises extreme patience, whereas my nervousness works to test, bend, and poke his. I dive head first into worst-case scenario thinking; he jumps in straight after me, pulling me out.

Nothing is too much trouble. "Darling" is my name, not Rebecca. The first "I love you": his. Enveloping arms around me: "Everything will be fine." Our rumbles resolved before heads hit pillows: "I'm sorry." Sleeping and snoring: a comfort. He's there. Noises checked, things fixed, quotes for cars looked after. Days of work: debriefed, resolved. Weekends: no plans, pottering. Our favourite. Just to see him, corner of my eye: happiness.

Music we prefer, both sets of ears adore. Never do I dance by myself. We bare teeth and upturn corners following dark, cheeky quips. Made-up silly singsongs fill car trips, followed by dedications: "That one was for you." Faces are pulled, making me grip the seat with laughter. The effort he makes: I try and reciprocate, but can't match.

The dog, which once belonged to me, is now also his – if not more so. Dogs know sweethearts.

I'm never left without a kiss. Give, give, give. He speaks reason. Me: panic. About him: good-humoured, levelheaded. "One of the good ones," is often said. This is why I love him.

This is why we fell in love.

thegranfields.com

photograph: Feather & Stone Photography

Rabbit & Hound

Belinda Suzette

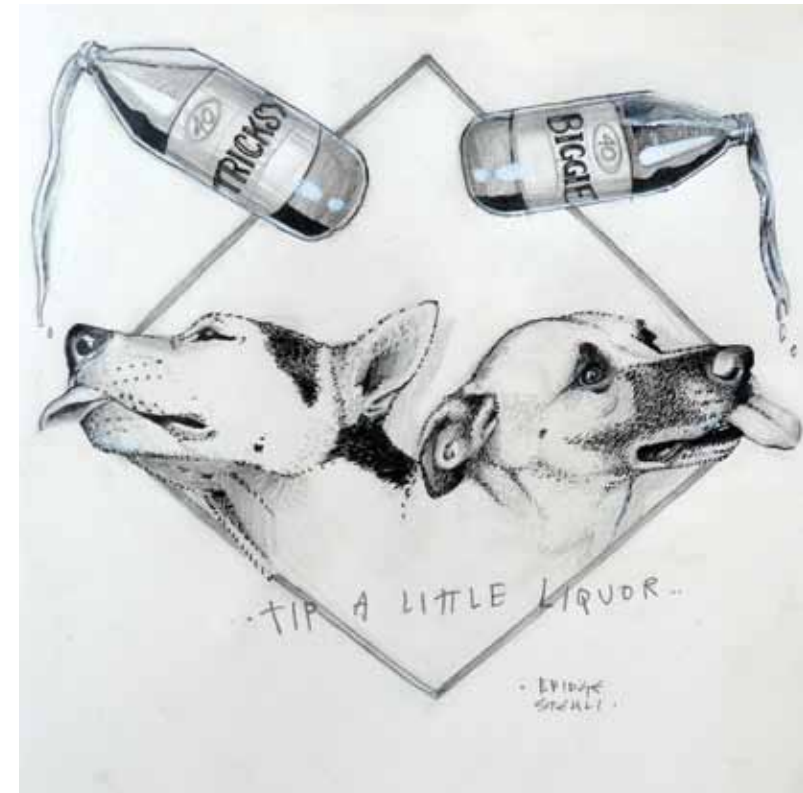


Katie and I, heading off on our travels together,
to traverse the universe one adventure at a time.

belindasuzette.com

TRICKSY (1991 - 2007) BIGGIE (2000 - 2013) R.I.P

Bridge Stehli



bridgestehli.com



Potting On

Monique Rothstein

Let me introduce myself – or at least, a version of myself – for man is many faces and I am no exception.

Perhaps I will speak in third person, for there is a third person in all of us. Perhaps she will give way to the first. She was born to feel it all. Childhood nostalgia was steeped in feverishly read fairy tales and dusty traces of unused vinyl, slumped in corners, burdened with potential. Unrealised potential was her kryptonite.

When she was younger, the television promised a life beyond the suburbs... her father's timeshare pamphlets would arrive every month in an empty letterbox. Her ten year old self would cut out the palm trees and Hollywood signs and mediocre samples of cookie-cut-out couples sporting a lifetime of warm weather. She would trace the silhouettes with her searching fingers, just as she continued to do twenty years later around the contour of a lost lover. He was only mysterious because he did not know himself. He made scrambled eggs and smiled at her from the other end of the table like a prince sitting with his queen, and whose grin makes the brown avocados green again.

Overflowing with potential, she watered his garden of dreams and madly hoped that they would flower. She nourished and nurtured and gave in and gave up until she realised she had dug up her own backyard. One day, fully blossomed and having bloomed in her sunshine, he no longer needed her. He left her to clean up the mess of broken weeds and to her, it were as if the world had turned the light off. She flapped and fluttered and fought against the weight of herself – all the while forgetting that she had wings.

But somewhere in the middle of this sticky quicksand-kind-of-a-sadness, the magic revealed itself.

As unlikely as it was slow and steady, she was shown the sort of kindness that you forget about when the wine is chilling, the garden is watered and the gentle sound of laughter wafts over you in the nighttime. Here, she was held and humoured, peeled off the floor, whispered to and then held again.

Her mother flew from the other side of the country to hold her shaking hands as boxes were packed. She was read stories to and made tea and threw mud pies at the sea and yelled his name and then watched the waves roll in and out again. She laughed until she cried and then she kept crying.

And as the rain poured out of her face like a thunderstorm, amid cracked coffee cups, unsent letters, and soaked pillowcases, the world began to restore order. It wasn't the order that she had ordered, but it was order.

She declared herself deserving and commissioned her new garden with vigilance. Scrawled floor plans saw hallways lined with a sturdier aristocracy; she was clearer on the layout and she was stubborn with her set-up. Scribbled papers became manuscripts and tears transformed into tulips and whilst she couldn't quite see the sun just yet, she knew that she would.

She truly believed that nothing stripped a queen of her crown quicker than not being fought for. I can now conclude that fighting for my own happiness won it back.

"This girl is too proud to be another black mark in some boys' story." And it is from my new backyard – overflowing with vibrant roses, scrambling greenery, tall and protective trees, with the sunshine in my eyes – that I am scribing my own version of the happy ending.

sixagain.tumblr.com

M O V I N G T H R O U G H
T H I S L A N D



*Who we are works in tandem with where we are.
Our mind, body and spirit are all intrinsically linked
to the land beneath our feet. Place brings our senses
to life, and let's us show it what we are made of.*

—

*If you were to write the physical world
a love letter, what would you say?*

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

Lonely Island for One

Gemma Rasmussen

When I was little, I loved earthquakes. The idea that the stable ground beneath my feet could rock back and forth was exhilarating. I couldn't understand how or why it happened but I liked that something that seemed so concrete and permanent could be shook up when fate commanded. I couldn't understand why adults seemed to react to such occasions with trepidation.

I moved to Japan in August 2010. In the first few months I would wake up in my tatami apartment and feel nervous and excited about what the day would bring. Never had I been pushed so far from my comfort zone.

Japan is different in every single way: the trees look more orderly, people bow and apologise profusely over minor things, and quaint bicycles line the sweltering streets. The language is difficult, and at times, terrifying. Every day, you learn something new.

When I arrived in my new apartment, I cried in the kitchen, surrounded by my suitcases, and thought, "what have I done?" I was scared. I then meandered along the neon lanes of the supermarket, dazed and confused about what everything was. I left that day with a bunch of bananas and a pack of beer. At that point, they were the only things I was certain of.

Japan taught me how to be alone.



While in New Zealand, people had always surrounded me. I may have even developed slight 'fear of missing out'. Suddenly I knew no one, I lived alone, and I was lonely.

Gradually, my culture shock subsided and I learnt the importance of time to oneself. Japan gave me a strange new sense of confidence. Going solo to movies, cafes, restaurants and gigs became easy.

I taught at a Senior High School in a town called Yonezawa, in the Tohoku region. Friday, the 11th of March had been pretty mundane. The students were on study leave so I spent most of the afternoon in the staffroom. I procrastinated my Japanese studies, read articles on the Internet, planned lessons, chatted to my co-workers and did a touch of writing. At 2.45pm, the staffroom began to shake. I wasn't too worried, as we had had little earthquakes in the previous weeks. I knew the Japanese word for earthquake, jishin or 地震, as in the prior month my co-workers had expressed concern about the Christchurch jishin and I had followed the news closely, making sure friends were okay.

The shaking, which had started slowly, became more violent.

People around me were beginning to look afraid, and my thoughts became consumed with what a terrible noise the earthquake made. The rattling created a menacing sound, heightening the collective sense of anxiety with each shake.

Someone turned on the television, and the screen lit up with a live shot of a city skyline shaking. Books began falling off desks, and shelves and photocopiers shimmied across the room. Everyone crouched on the floor and looked around nervously. A science teacher rubbed my back to comfort me and then we got under our desks. One minute passed and the shaking continued. I crouched under my desk as things fell left, right and centre. My mind was blank and adrenalin pulsed through my veins. My jaw was clenched, my hands were shaking and I felt ready to run. It continued on and on, extending into what felt like an eternity. I learnt later it was just over three minutes. During that time I felt afraid, but so alive.

Then it stopped.

My hands were shaking terribly and my jaw hurt from being clenched so tightly. I felt exhausted but full of nervous energy.

My fingers failed me as I tried to email my mother to say, “I’m okay”. For hours afterwards it felt like I had boarded a boat that was rocking slightly. The ground felt like liquid. My co-workers and I huddled around the television and watched apocalyptic images of water sweeping over the Sendai plains, enveloping people, planes, cars and buildings like they were Lego pieces.

I felt disbelief and immense sadness. Small details like a car windscreen wiper going back and forth meant that, horror of horrors, someone was in that car. Someone was in that building, or beneath that rubble, or in that tree. I worried for my friends in Sendai, a place too familiar – a meagre hop, skip and a jump away and an often-frequented weekend destination.

That evening, my friends and I stayed together in one apartment, too nervous to sleep. Japan has an electronic earthquake warning system for most phones. The night was spent springing up and racing to the doorframes after each phone warning. Some shakes were small and others were big. Each time the nerves were further rattled. Sleep deprivation became a state of being.

The days to come were exhausting. Everything became difficult.

There was limited gas, the temperature plummeted into a state of snowy misery, food was vanishing because everyone was panicking and there was no bottled water, milk, or bread.

The aftershocks continued, and amidst the anxiety we received terrible news. There was a nuclear accident a mere 100km away from us and there was no assurance that things were getting better.

Trying to wade through the sea of information provided by both Western and Japanese media was discombobulating and uncomfortable.

The Western media talked of a nuclear meltdown as bad as Chernobyl, which was hard for me to wrap my mind around. My inbox became flooded with urgent messages from friends and family, pleading for me to come home. Meanwhile at work, the television blared but I could understand little of what was being said.

At that time I felt so uncertain about how bad things were. Was I in the middle of a nuclear meltdown? Would everything be okay? Who should I listen to? I had always trusted my gut instinct but during that time I lost my bearings. I packed my bag, not sure where I was going. What to pack? Batteries, snow boots, an old torch, a bag of peanuts and some thermals.

Sleep deprivation and anxiety muddled my choices. One afternoon, nearly a week after the earthquake, a particularly strong aftershock struck. I was standing in my kitchen washing dishes when I was struck with a familiar thought. “What am I doing here?”

A few friends and I got together and we booked tickets out of Japan. As soon as this was decided I felt immense relief. With a saved tank of gas we made it across the country to where transportation was running and caught a Shinkansen to Tokyo.

Sitting in the plane ready for take off, the cabin crew told us a magnitude four earthquake had just struck, and they were checking the tarmac for cracks. I had never wanted to leave a place so badly.

Arriving in New Zealand felt wonderful, and safe. All I had wanted was a dark room, aftershock free, for heavy, uninterrupted sleep. After much rest I started to feel less zombie-like, but not really myself. It was like the tiredness had seeped into my bones and someone had deleted all creative urges from my mind.

I attempted to take photos, lurching back into a familiar sense of reality, but they came out flat and uninspired. My computer stayed switched off, my sentences trailed off into nothingness.

The normality and safety of my new and uncertain time in New Zealand felt bizarre. It took time, lots and lots of time to feel right again. I worried intensely that I had lost something crucial from myself – a knack for relating to people. As no one could really understand what I had been through, I in turn failed to understand others, leaving me stranded on my own lonely island for one.

These days I feel more like a functioning human being. I still have times where I feel like I’m back on my lonely island with the world oblivious to my isolation, but these days are few and far between, and I know I’ll come out the other side.

Obviously, things will never be the same for Japan, but it’s getting better, slowly. When I returned I saw that the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. They were tinged with sadness, serving as a poignant reminder of extreme beauty and fleeting mortality. I have been in complete awe of the resilience and bravery of the Japanese people and hope that things can only get better for the country.

The best things to come out a natural disaster are acts of selflessness, goodwill and love.

In Japan, it is everywhere.

tenderloveandaseedywink.blogspot.com.au

I'm a descendant from the Quandamooka people
(North Stradbroke Island) in South East Queensland.
I make futuristic/hypothetical flood maps that
employ Australian military maps and Aboriginal
toponyms to create new landscapes that are familiar
yet challenge our sense of place and identity, and
perceptions of time and ownership of land.

nutmegandhoney.blogspot.com.au

Yunggulba (Flood Tide)

Megan Cope





No Place Like Home

Raquel Duron Perez



I've always had the feeling that I used to be a gypsy in another life. I guess this idea comes from the fact that I can't stand still. Just thinking about going to a new place and exploring it, getting to know its culture, its people, its food, making new friends and getting lost in it excites me.

This is how I ended up living here in Australia, 14,400km away from home. I came to Sydney three years ago to do my masters degree and I never thought I would stay here so long, but destiny played its tricks on me and I've now settled down (well, kind of).

But lately an old friend has started to visit me again; the feeling of restlessness has come by and haunted me in my dreams. So I decided it was time to go somewhere, and even though there are still many places I want to see and explore in this world – this time home was calling me.

This trip to Mexico was a lot more than just going back to visit friends and family, and reconnecting with my identity and my culture. It was a reaffirmation that when you are connected to something and you are genuine and want it from the heart, the universe conspires to make it happen.

I met interesting characters, ate amazing food, became mesmerised by my country's beautiful and colourful architecture and the warmth and friendliness of its people, and felt confronted by the contrast within its society.

I got lost in my culture and found myself again. I felt that tingle of fulfillment and happiness in my stomach, but it quickly vanished as soon as I started to think about the future and how uncertain everything looked.

Were these feelings a sign that I wanted to go back to Mexico and leave everything I had built in Australia behind? What about my friends? My work? My professional network? I soon realised I had also created a second home in Sydney, and I found myself questioning if I was willing to leave it behind.

I came back to Sydney and that feeling of restlessness has moved to a feeling of confusion. I am confused because I am not sure what home means anymore. Is it the place where you were raised? Is it where your family and friends are? Is it the city you decide to build your life in? Is it the people that surround you?

I have this romantic idea to go back to Mexico and live in the jungle in Chiapas, or to move to Oaxaca and work in the field with Indigenous people. But I also know this romantic idea exists in my head, and the reality is not as romantic. The situation in Mexico is hard, and part of me knows that I can do so much more from here.

During my trip to Mexico I found myself taking pictures of everything in the hopes that documenting it would allow me to take the memories back to Australia. I've always thought that every place had its own personality, defined by the colours in the buildings, the cracks in the walls, the smells in the streets and the phonetics in its language. I guess when I took these pictures I was unconsciously trying to capture Mexico's essence, so I could take it with me wherever I went.

I hope you are also able to see the personality of my beautiful Mexico, and that I am able to transport you to this magical and diverse place that I call home.

mahico.org





Spaces as Kingdoms

Mariam Arcilla

When I was eight, my father, an artist and obsessive illustrator, drew me a caricature of a homeless man and his makeshift table, which he had fashioned from cardboard boxes and plastic bottles. Resting on top of this table was a feast of turkey, lobster, caviar and exotic fruits – all of which the vagrant was devouring. Above him floated a thought bubble, in which my father – who had a thing for the cryptic – wrote, ‘Fit for a King.’ My father, who noted my child-like confusion, explained, “Mariam, if you squint hard enough, you can see things differently. You can make any place, anywhere you lay, your little kingdom.”

At the time, my travel-bugged stewardess mother had just sought a divorce from my father, and part-time custody of me. So perhaps my father’s drawing was his way of cushioning me ahead of what was going to be a childhood gypsied between a dozen homes and four countries.

As I adapted myself to different areas, I became transfixed with the potential of empty spaces. I relished in adorning rooms with objects, furniture and other imprints, as if they were some kind of showroom, or temporary exhibition. This interest grew when my mother – who at 45 had grown tired of the skies, and perhaps perpetual homelessness – decided to retire on Queensland’s Gold Coast.

At 14, I too favoured a bit of grounding, so I began to live with my mother full-time.

While my mother’s intention was to retreat to the Gold Coast and become dormant, my need was the opposite. My feet now firmly placed in a home, I wanted to become volcanic. I wanted to bloom, to meet artists, to engage in creative experiences.

See, as a child, I loved consuming the arts, and throughout my domestic limbo I was always able to feel ‘at home’ while inside a gallery, an art studio or a creative space. These were my constants. So it was disheartening to find that even though the Gold Coast had three well-regarded art schools, the city abysmally lacked spaces dedicated to the arts, let alone local and emerging arts.

What’s more, during my time at art school, I noticed a growing flock of artists – especially those wanting to advance their careers or learn an industry trade – pack suitcases and direct themselves towards the Big Smoke.

So after I graduated, I set out to become a curator and creative placemaker, with the hope of providing spaces for artists to create and showcase work, and initiating programs to help enliven the local creative community. I began by volunteering at galleries and arts organisations to learn more about the industry, and forming partnerships with property developers to source abandoned and under-used spaces. I then collaborated with artists to activate these spaces into exhibitions, studio spaces and creative hubs.



Squinting hard enough gave me the chops to transform the unlikeliest of spaces into bustling, creative experiments: a former carpark became 19 KAREN Contemporary Artspace, a hidden alley is now a must-see street art location, scores of empty and unloved shops became the scenes for art shows and studios, and a mostly-empty fourteen-warehouse property was activated into the lively creative precinct Rabbit+Cocoon.

By the time I turned 30 I had owned a gallery business, kick-started our city’s first creative precinct, formed a council-funded urban activation initiative, and curated fifty artist-run projects around the city.

Rabbit+Cocoon, where I currently serve as co-director, is a not-for-profit precinct that provides hundreds of artists with a plethora of spaces in which to produce new, exciting art every day.

We run various arts projects in collaboration with the local and wider community. We also host monthly programs that encourage the public to connect with the arts sector, and to partake in activities and advocations that contribute towards our city’s cultural enrichment.

So, perhaps the reason why I have remained in the same home since I moved to the Gold Coast 16 years ago, is because I am content with ‘make-shifting’ spaces. By transforming empty spaces into bustling pockets and neglected corners into vibrant public areas I have, in a way, turned cardboard and plastic into creative feasts, worthy of devouring.

As my father would say, I am imagining my little kingdom.

mariamarcilla.com
rabbitandcocoon.com



A Voice Inside

Safdar Ahmed & the Refugee Art Project

The idea for the Refugee Art Project sprang out of a chance conversation in which a friend told me about his visits to the Villawood detention centre. I had always wanted to go but I also wanted to contribute something, so we decided to form an art class. The plan worked and in a short space of time, we had a large group consisting of asylum seekers from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Burma. Given that many of our participants had never attempted to make art before, it was rewarding to see them discover their ability and turn it into something special.

Kamaleshwaran Selladurai is a case in point. He painted for the first time inside Villawood and loved it immediately. I think art sustained him during the 26 months he was locked away.

We have also held public exhibitions with the artwork collected. The idea is to give asylum seekers a voice through art, and to convey something of their experiences to the Australian people. Because refugees cannot leave the centre (and are often kept for up to two years or more), they are excited for their work to be seen and appreciated by people.

Given the high levels of trauma and depression among people in detention, it is important for them to have an activity where they can express themselves. I am always amazed by the work produced in our classes. It conveys a strong sense of personality, imagination, humour, and the desire to be treated with dignity and respect.

therefugeeartproject.com

S, 'I love Australia'

Country of origin: Pakistan

Time in detention: 26 months

'I was very happy during painting classes. Indeed, I am very grateful for all of the friends who visited me and supported me during my time in Villawood. Those people showed me immense kindness and I would love to repay them someday.'



Kamaleshwaran Selladurai, 'Freedom'

Country of origin: Sri Lanka

Time in detention: 26 months

'I lived in detention for two years and I was stressed every day. I was suffering. I can't forget the time, which was a sad period for me. In detention, I started drawing and painting for the first time. Painting has changed my life. I have improved in my art and I love to paint new and different subjects.'



H, 'The Door'

Country of origin: Afghanistan

Time in detention: 25 months

'Light is the symbol of hope. Whatever the situation is, and whatever will become of my life, there is always a hope which keeps me going. I am grateful for all those people who gave me the chance to seek for the light of hope.'



J, 'Knots'

Country of origin: Afghanistan

Time in detention: 26 months

'I arrived in Australia and was full of hope but then they put me in detention and destroyed my hope. It felt like my life was knotted, and we are still suffering. We are unlucky to be born in a war-torn country where our families are not safe. I still have hope and pray that God will give me my own life.'



J, 'Candle'

I enjoy drawing because it keeps me busy for three, four, sometimes five hours. I can focus my mind on drawing and not think about other things, like being in detention. It helps me to think about something else. When I draw, I try to make my drawing very neat and clean, and when I draw this way, I feel like my heart is clean.'

On the Street

Gimiks Born

I always loved the style and boldness of graffiti, sometimes referred to as street art, but never thought I could actually do it. I was given an old Hype mag to look at when I was very young, maybe nine or 10, by a friend at school. He had stolen it the night before from his older sister's boyfriend and was copying pieces out of it. I was instantly drawn in by the styled-out Bboy characters that graced the pages, and I feverishly tried my very best to replicate them. I can even remember drawing them on the blackboard in coloured chalk at school, and having contests with other mates on who could draw the best Bboy. I had always loved and respected graffiti in general but I didn't actually start participating in the scene until late 2004.

I guess I chose to pursue graffiti as a mode of expression because it was so damn fun.

I personally think street art is a legitimate contemporary art movement in its own right, and an invaluable form of expression. It is the unedited, creative thoughts of people who are willing to express themselves unashamedly to a commercially dominated society without expectation of reward. I believe there is something beautiful in this way of thinking, regardless of the nature of it.

gimiksborn.com



B R E A T H I N G
T O U C H I N G / S E N S I N G



*Our bodies are our vehicles on this planet. We are
made up of blood and veins and atoms and mass. But
although our presence is undeniably linked to our
physicality, we all one day realise that we are so much
more than that. It is then that we learn how to use it.*

—

*How have you and your body
gotten to know each other?*

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

Crossing the Threshold

Kristen Brumm

I think there is a pivotal moment in every life that breaks it into two distinct halves: a Before and an After. For me, that shift happened when two life-altering events occurred within a matter of weeks. My former husband assaulted me in my home on a Saturday morning in 2010, and 12 days later he came under criminal investigation for child pornography.

In those 12 days, the life I had known dramatically disintegrated. I sat there, stunned and unsure what to do.

Eventually, I made the decision to write about my experiences on my blog. I wrote about my fear and pain and confusion. I took a deep breath and wrote the words domestic violence, and then several months later I wrote the words child pornography.

Telling my story was like lifting a stone off my chest. It allowed me to breathe. It set the trajectory for a soul-level healing and sowed the seeds for what would eventually become a richer and more authentic life.

It also inducted me, quite unexpectedly, into a community of kindred souls. When I told my story, women began writing to me and sharing their own stories of violence. They wrote to me and told me I was not alone. Not just a few women, but many, many women. I couldn't quite believe how many.

When I stood and took stock of these women, I saw that they came from all backgrounds. They were young and old, wealthy and poor, straight and gay. Our troubled stories played out behind the closed doors of ordinary homes in every neighbourhood, in every country.

One in every four women will be a victim of domestic violence. It is an epidemic, if a largely silent one.

These women taught me something I didn't know. They taught me that the road I walked, while it felt dark and solitary, was one I didn't travel alone. Though our interactions were often brief – a sharing of stories, a virtual hug and a parting – their resonance was felt long afterward.

As I felt my way towards a new life, their invisible presence buoyed me. They were with me when I filed for a protection order. They sat beside me in the courtroom as I testified. When I was diagnosed with PTSD and lay in bed for two weeks, exhausted and bereft, they whispered to me that everything was going to be okay. In essence, they stood with me, hand in hand, as I stepped over the threshold from the Before into the After.

It's been almost three years now and I've told my story so many times it no longer makes me wince or catch my breath. My ex-husband's case is set to go to trial in two months. I bought him out of our home, and I'm raising our two kids on my own. I recently went to work for a domestic violence shelter, where women come to seek refuge and healing, leaving behind their own shattered histories. I have the honour of walking beside them, for a brief spell, as they cross the boundary into a new, more promising future.

wanderlustlust.com

Cubes for Comfort

Samantha Ewart

The inspiration for my Music Cubes project stemmed from the frustration I experienced seeing my younger brother constantly in and out of the hospital.

I always noticed a coldness in the environment, a lack of colour, and a desperate need for stimulation. When my brother was in hospital, he often didn't have a place to call his own – something that might be viewed as a fundamental need for a person with unruly hormones.

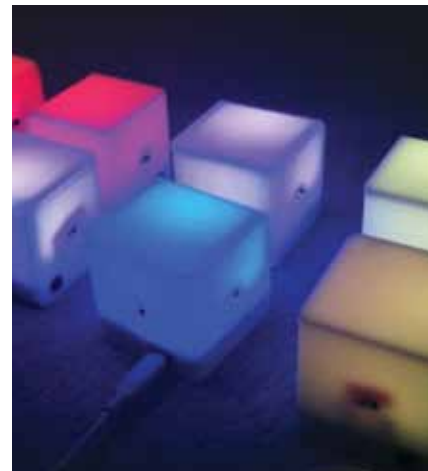
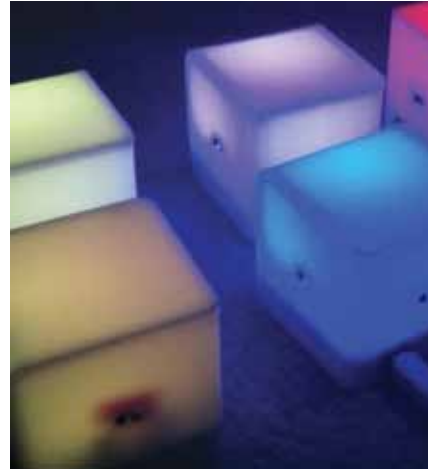
Adolescents are thrust into either children's wards or adults' wards, so the time spent within hospitals is confusing and challenging for them.

It is bad enough that as teenagers, they are missing school, friends, parties, soccer games, and the routine of normal life, but their experience is exacerbated by the fact that they are at an age where they are becoming more independent and want to be considered and treated as adults.

The Music Cubes project is an effort to do something about this predicament.

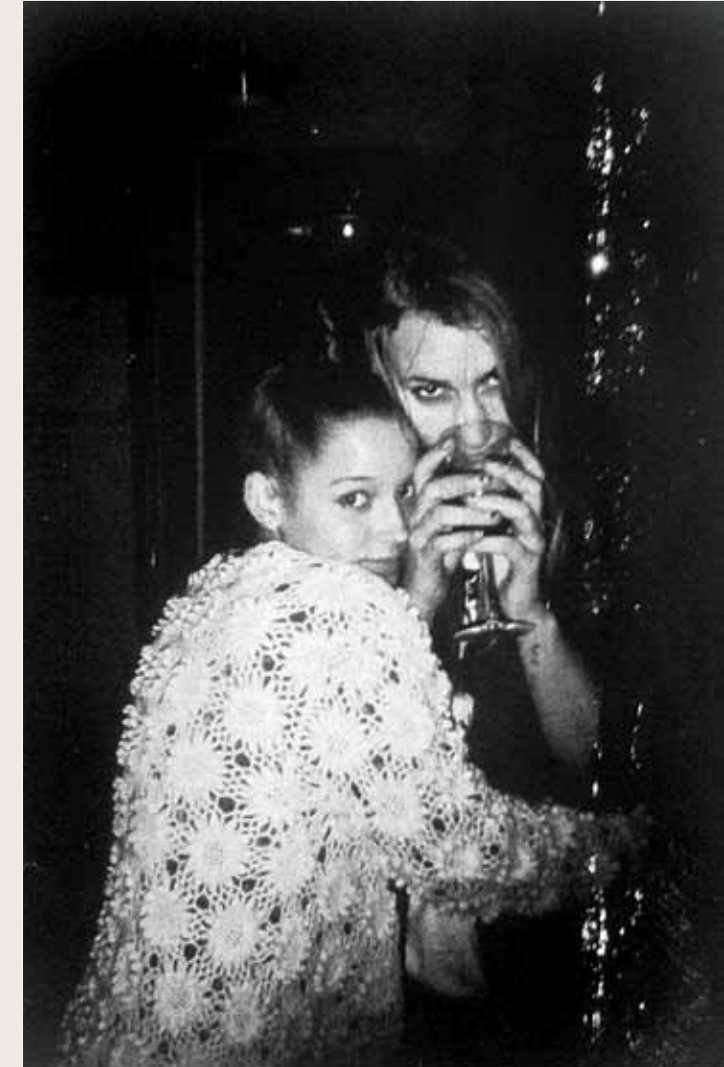
By introducing an interactive music-making device into the hospital environment, not only do young people have a device to creatively engage and socialise with, they are also given a tool for entertainment, which in some small way they can call their own.

interactivemusicfordistracton.blogspot.com.au



Diary of an Eating Disorder in Recovery

Thembi Hanify & Chelsea Hunter



THCH, ~~2010~~ 2010.
LATE

chelsea-hunter.com
thembihanify.com

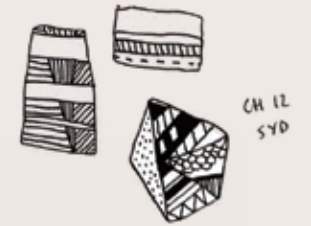
Going crazy without you here.

C.

Yuck. Let's get lipo.
Love you.

my beautiful lady.

CALORIE
OBSESSION.



MISO YOU.

Also You

I just binged.
I purged in the shower so Peter wouldn't hear.

obj. Most pages will still contain, except, perhaps
 (perhaps, perhaps, perhaps and avoid).



10. Brownie salad with mushrooms, tomato, feta and balsamic.



2011

THICH FOOD
/ RECIPE BLOG

I'm sorry for being such a hard know it all Chelsea. It's only now that we talk in realistic terms about our habits... you used to be 'strict' i.e. you used to starve yourself during the day, I was so jealous because I didn't have that kind of self control.

SINGLE MINDED CHALLENGE: DO NOT EAT ANYTHING ON THE PLANE

I had nightmares about eating a pizza and like 3 bowls of spaghetti



one of million
fucking more pages
what I am
something from
fall of the
promise next day
at least my
intention
was good.

SUNDAY 20 FEB ACH.
From this point onwards, I will never binge on junk food again. This includes: cookies, packets of chips, cheese sticks, pizza, nuts, trail mix. I will not be restrictive but at the same time I will stop at all costs actions that make me feel bad, uncomfortable and unconfident about myself. I will love my body to its fullest instead. Macrobiotics + yoga meditation. Mindfulness for

TH → CH

Hangover, and a full blown binge, two purges. Argh Chels, I feel like this has been such a huge set back. I'm struggling not to slip back into really negative thoughts. All this week I just felt so fat. I am so fat Chels. I tried on those grey acid wash shorts I own and wore in Sydney with no real trouble, and they felt so so tight, hard to get on, body bulging over the top of them and fat thighs sticking out the bottom. My ass is so huge. It just sticks out and it makes me feel so so uncomfortable.

I need a little help. I am sorry. Gonna start sending you a food diary again tomorrow.

Hope you're better than I am.

Miss you. X

CH → TH

don't worry beb, I did the same last night. I feel gross too. I have been lazy though and haven't purged as much, so I am actually getting bigger. don't forget missy, its winter!!! everyone is bigger in winter, der! let me know how you go. just remember..... its not the end of the world. x

[Quoted text hidden]

SAT 5 FEB 2011 10:12 PM

Fri, Feb 25, 2011 at 10:08 PM

Ok Chels.

I've had such a shit of a day. This is what I ate from when I woke up...

Two tahini rice cakes,

a tub of mixed nuts

ach patty thing with cheese, hummus and sauce on two bits of bread

a huge slice of cheese pizza

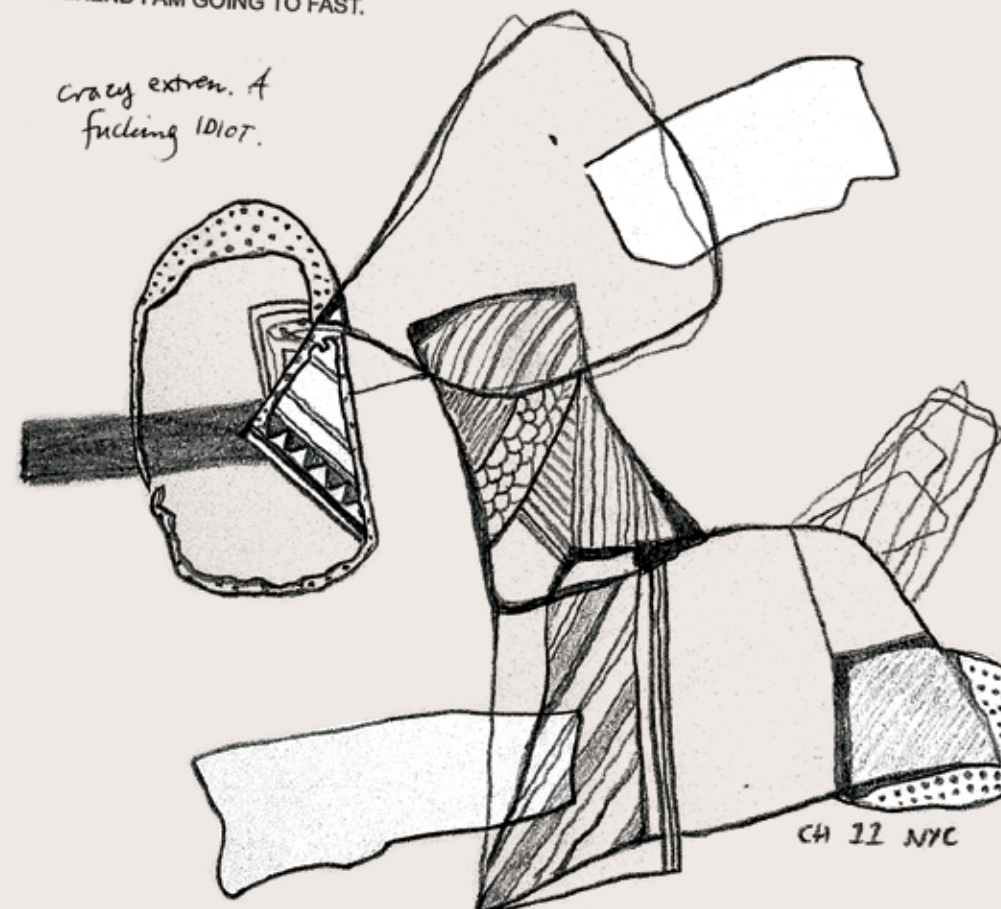
plus some garlic bread things,

PURGE

Peter was home so I couldn't do anything and I just felt completely overcome with disgust and guilt and I just felt so disgusting. Any excuse to eat myself silly. It made me feel so sick too. And so I just tore around the house cleaning stuff and ran to the store to get dishwashing liquid and ran up and down the stairs to do my washing etc etc. And then I just got so delirious and I feel so tired and exhausted and fat and I came to the conclusion that:

THIS WEEKEND I AM GOING TO FAST.

crazy extren. A
fucking IDIOT.



CH 11 NYC

REMEMBER -
NO MATTER THE YEAR OR THE DATE OR THE TIME.
NO MATTER WHAT CAME BEFORE OR WHAT'S TO COME AFTER.
BE PRESENT.
YOU HAVE RIGHT NOW TO BE THE HAPPIEST YOU'VE EVER BEEN.
FORGET THE HUMAN-NESS OF TIME.
FLY ABOVE IT.



When they operated on my infection, I was delirious with pain and fever, awake in the ward under a scalpel. They opened a scar on the front of my abdomen, just above my pubic hair, and it went straight into my intestine: it was literally a 10 x 4cm hole to my insides. Horrific, I thought. I was absolutely horrified by my own body.

I was there, looking at the gory insides of my abdomen, because I had suffered for 12 years with ulcerative colitis, a chronic autoimmune disease that, like Lupus, rheumatoid arthritis or celiac disease, is caused by the immune system attacking the healthy tissues of the body. For ulcerative colitis patients, the immune system attacks the lining of the large intestine, causing ulceration. This basically has devastating effects on the digestive system and the processing of food for nutrition. Plus it produces chronic pain, urgency and fatigue.

After many years of trying various medications and alternative treatments alike (and failing to make any progress at all), I had a series of three surgeries that removed my diseased large intestines and re-configured my insides so that part of my small intestines sort of replaced the big ones.

I remember the first few days of convalescence after that first surgery and having to redress the wound for the first time on my own. I cried. It felt strange, crying at the sight of my own flesh. I felt a powerful sense of revulsion and disconnectedness, and fear – I struggled to overcome the feeling that what I was seeing was a mortal wound.

I spent a good eight months after my first surgery in recovery. It was a positive state that was almost completely new to me, having pushed through many years of chronic pain, malnutrition, side effects, and life disruptions from an illness I apparently thought might just go away on its own.

I had been ill for a very long time: so long that I had forgotten what it was like to be “healthy”. Like most people, I’d say I didn’t have particularly detailed memories of my life before the age of 12, so I only really remembered life with illness. The absence of this illness was (and sometimes still is) a huge thing to come to terms with, mentally.

I particularly struggled with my perception of myself and my achievements. I had always made it a rule that I would never let my illness give me an advantage in life for any reason. I didn’t want to be treated differently because I was sick, so for the most part of 12 years I didn’t mention it to close friends, partners or employers for fear that I’d be treated differently because of it.

In fact, most people in my life were completely shocked by my surgery, as they had no idea that there was anything wrong with me in the slightest.

As the remnants of chronic illness slowly dissipated from my life, I began to realise that although I hadn’t let it affect my external relationships, it had certainly affected my relationship with myself. I had silently been making excuses for myself, or writing things off, assuming that I’d never achieve them anyway. “You can’t do that,” I’d think. “That’s something that people without illnesses do.”

With the burden of the disease suddenly lifted, I felt intimidated and sort of cowardly in the face of limitless possibility. My ‘potential’ as a person had just increased, and I didn’t know if I was ready to accept the responsibility that came along with that.

I could do anything. And there was no excuse for not doing anything. Why wasn’t I making travel plans, starting a business, running a marathon? I was terrified, and paralysed as much by that fear as by my severed muscles.

I had made a choice to undergo these huge surgeries and put my trust in science; to literally put my life and health in to the hands of real experts. I had totally given up any hope of getting better “on my own”, and it was the best decision I have ever made.

Illness isn’t always a wound, and we don’t all have the option of perceiving it as one. For the 12 years before surgery, I had no wound, no abyss to stare into. It was really only when I was forced to confront illness in its physical form that I was able to start to really deal with it in reality. Even if an illness lacks physicality, it’s not fictional, or to be treated with fictional remedies.

It took that gaping hole in my abdomen for me to comprehend illness and separate myself from my disease; once the two things were distinct in my mind, healing was not such an insurmountable task. Compared to trying to heal an illness with my mind, it was a total breeze.

ameliaschmidt.tumblr.com

illustration: Julie Newton

L E A R N I N G
W E A R E O N E



*When we listen to our mind and body and creative
landscape, we undergo a spiritual revolution.
We become one with the intrinsic nature of the
universe, and are able to hear its call. Wisdom
is always granted to those who seek it.*

—

*What has made your soul grow stronger,
your light burn brighter? What has made
you understand the meaning of Love?*

—

share@thisplaceisyours.com

A Day at Edgar's Mission

Cybele Malinowski

It was so cold! The winter blue sunrise slowly revealed trees, then fields, then animals. We were driving into the unknown. The gravel crunched under the car as we approached a suburban brick house, transplanted to farmland. There is something so Australian about country Victoria. Norman Lindsay and William Dobel curated this part of the land.

We were there to shoot a friend of mine. She didn't show, so we turned the story onto the true hero of this story: Pam Ahern. An intern led us into the house - Pam's house, her lounge room a makeshift vet practice. Baby goats, some on the brink of collapse, were being spoon-fed by hand.

Pam's numerous cats watched on, resigned to the fact that they are in no way the centre of this animal lover's universe. Pam has created a haven: a second home, a last home for animals neglected, mistreated and forgotten by their human creators. We wandered around the farm from one barn to another - Pam introducing us to each creature formally, telling us how they ended up here, under her care. She has a bond with each and every animal on the farm. Such love. She has given her life to these animals.

Now, we can't expect everyone to have such passion and dedication to our animals, but, as Seema and I discussed on our journey home - high on life and hope - how can we help? Us mere suburban, inner-city mortals.

For me personally, I find vegetarianism is a self-rewarding practice that allows me to live my life without feeling fraught with guilt – let's face it, I am not on the arctic seas saving whales, I am in Sydney shooting models. Every vegetarian meal for me is a sacrifice. I have foregone meat for this meal, for the animals, for the environment. And the next meal, and the next. Each day, it is my choice, and it gives me strength.

I don't suggest it's for everybody, but I do think that people should consider sacrificing a few more meals a week to our Earth. It is not necessary to eat meat for every meal, but seems to be a norm here in Australia. A right. We need to change this image. Make people realise what they are eating, and actively reduce their consumption of meat for the Earth and animals, and for themselves. Physically and mentally.

We can't all be Pam Ahern, but we can be conscious eaters, and conscious consumers.

bangbangdot.com







In the Name of Thanks

Ben Lee

“Thank You” is the final song on my new album, *Ayahuasca: Welcome to the Work*. It comes at the end of a long and strange journey. The album is designed to mirror the difficult but enlightening process of working with the South American jungle medicine *Ayahuasca*, which I have been doing over the last few years. It is a ceremonial practice that takes one on a journey into the unknown reaches of our own unconscious issues and blockages, and help us move through them into a more open and present experience.

I made the album with my dear friend and collaborator Jessica Chapnik Kahn. We wanted it to feel like an *Ayahuasca* ceremony: enlightening, joyful, terrifying in places, twisting, turning, and ultimately, healing. Much of the music on the record is improvised and instrumental. Those songs that have lyrics are quite simple and mantra-like. It is not a word-driven experience by any means.

So when it came to writing the final song on the record, I knew I wanted it to reflect the attempt to begin translating the transcendent experience into language. This is difficult in real life, and difficult in song.

How do we take the experience of death and rebirth, the feeling of having let go of the old and stepping into the unknown future, and make it tangible, material and communicable?

For me, a massive element of the work with *Ayahuasca* that I have become conscious of, is a new relationship to gratitude. It's not about feeling that everything in life is perfect of easy, or just as you wanted it. It's a feeling that ultimately, the entire experience has been a positive one. It's one that I wouldn't trade for anything.

I was reminded of a phrase I once heard: “How do we express the inexpressible? Thank you.”

Jessy and I sat down together in India to finish the verse lyrics. We started listing things – Plastic. Gold. Mirrors. Smoke. Lovers. Loneliness. Everything. Nothing. – all things we are grateful for. It seemed to be the right way to end the album.

And what is the remembering?
What we are. The soul thanks the personality for making the journey. For going to the trouble of reconnecting. For remembering the truth.

Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering

For the sound and the source
And the wave and the storm
The machine and the dream
And the formless and the form
The question in the dark
And the shadow that we hide
The diamonds and the demons
And the trouble and desire
The spark in the space between us
The touch of a lover

Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering

For the money and the mess
And the lies we were told
And the dirt and the stress
And the plastic and the gold
The wounds that we hide
And the mirrors and the smoke
The things that we have
And the things that we don't
For the ways that we change
For everything
And thank you for nothing
Everything will fall away
The stories all begin to fade
Waiting to be born again

Everything will fall away
The stories all begin to fade
Waiting to be born again

Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering
Thank you for remembering

Forever

ben-lee.com

A Space for Thought

Jeremyville

I started drawing the Community Service Announcements in mid-2010 as a daily online project. They explore such concepts as self-empowerment, personal growth, human virtue, love, loss, and what it means to be human, through simple imagery and words.

We all need time to reflect, contemplate, and enter into our own thoughts, like when we're reading a haiku poem, or listening to an acoustic guitar played by a campfire. I try to create this feeling of introspection and quietness during the noise of our day, and provide people with a message that they can relate to and feel good about.

For me personally, these pieces are part of my journey into finding some answers to my own questions in life, and then distilling the essence of that understanding into a very simple design.

Hopefully there are others reading them who can also relate to the path I am on. The project is foremost a document of my own personal odyssey through this life.

I also bring my CSA messages to the streets, through my New York street newspaper Jeremyville RAW, and various street art paste-ups around the world.

I draw about six ideas each evening, and have posted around 600 online so far, with new ones appearing at my Facebook page 'Jeremyville Daily': [facebook.com/JeremyvilleDaily](https://www.facebook.com/JeremyvilleDaily) and my Instagram feed [@Jeremyville](https://www.instagram.com/Jeremyville).

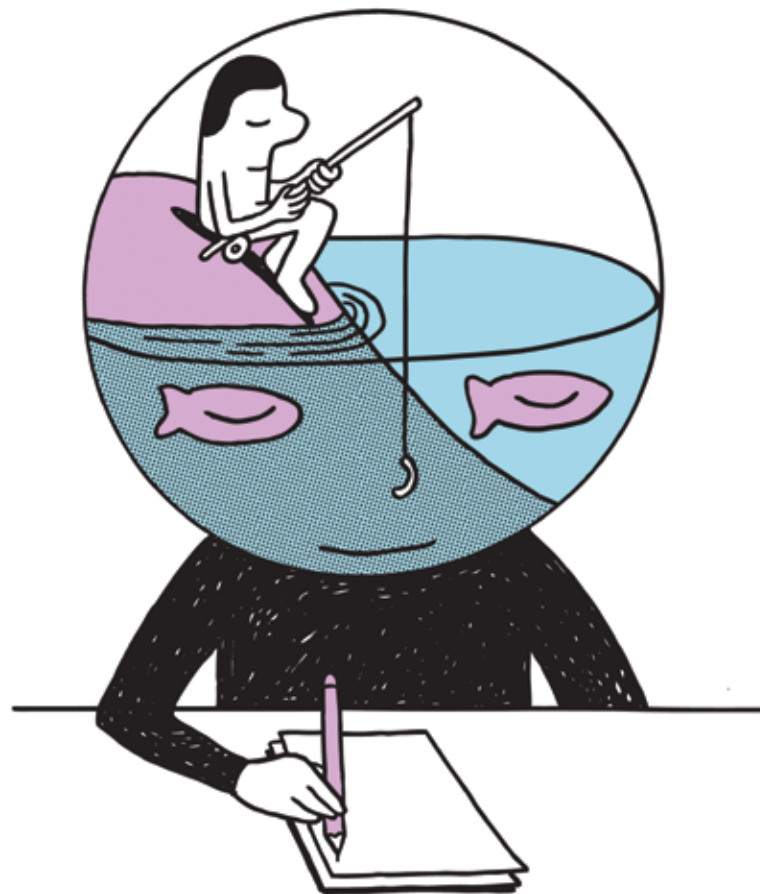
I hope you can start to follow them every day.

jeremyville.com



**OUR INNERMOST
THOUGHTS
WILL SAVE US.**

**THIS HAS BEEN A JEREMYVILLE
COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT.**



BE PATIENT.

THIS HAS BEEN A JEREMYVILLE
COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT.



STUFF
HAPPENS.

THIS HAS BEEN A JEREMYVILLE
COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT.

The Spirit and the Adventure

Allan Rudner

It is Sunday midday in Port Hedland Western Australia. I have been here for about six weeks, leaving all the familiarity, human warmth, friendliness and challenges of the last 30 years behind in Sydney.

I am just back from an 8km walk, soaked from top to bottom from my own sweat in the unrelenting, persistent summer heat of the North West.

Still, it is a good time to reflect on my life, and the journey that has brought me to this place of contradictions.

What is it that really drove me to be here, rising each day at 4:45am in the dark to face an unforgiving landscape of people and terrain, only to return to a barely semi-private place to rest at sunset?

Looking back, I catch a glimpse of my relationship with Spirit and how I have been guided forward in my life...

As a youth and into my early adulthood I had a strong sense of “how life should be”. I did everything to make the world fit my vision of a good life for me. If only [this or that], then life would be good. Did that work? Of course not! I remember a time when I was about 10 years old and visited the Johannesburg zoo with my younger brother and cousin. We lined up for a pony ride with great excitement and anticipation. I saw a beautiful snow white pony I wanted to ride, so I attempted to time my turn to coincide with the availability of the white pony. Alas, no matter how much I dropped back anticipating the moment, I kept missing the opportunity and dropped back further. All the while my brother and cousin enjoyed delightful multiple rides around the circuit on a range of different ponies.

I did not get to ride my white pony that day or any other day.

What I did learn was that my attachment to a specific experience thwarted the opportunity to immerse myself in sharing a real boyhood pleasure.

Through the years of adulthood, the challenges of broken marriages and relationships, continental separation from my son, financial success and failure, betrayal, depression, loss and grief, and career changes, have contributed to shaping me into the man that I am.

The black hole has stared me in the face on more than one occasion. Looking back, I can see my causing of a motor accident and a near drowning in the ocean as reckless attempts to take my own life.

The gift that I believe I received from Spirit has been my ability to develop my powers of self-reflection. To be able to challenge my own belief system by suspending my attachment to the embedded belief handed to me in my early years through parents, family, school and religion. Today I take pleasure in being able to sit with the discomfort of “Not Knowing”, waiting for emergent new understandings to rise from the depths of my soul.

Trusting myself, being unhurried and accepting and dealing with whatever shows up in front of me, has imbued me with an incredible sense of spiritual, emotional, physical and mental freedom.

My life is an adventure. At 66 years I have embarked on yet another generative life-enhancing exploration, alone, away from my tribe, facing a myriad of new challenges every day. The deeper journey is just more of, Who am I? As a man, father, friend, lover, elder, contributor?

That speaks to my real attachment – revealing and expressing my true self to the benefit of the communities I serve.

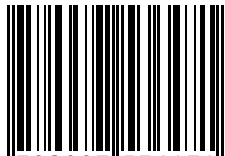
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This Place is Yours

Laura Luke



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