Feel moved or inspired to respond to our zine? Email us at: zinesbrissc@gmail.com

#### Services that can help;

Brisbane Rape & Incest Survivors Support Centre (BRISSC) (07) 3391 0004 9am-1pm, Mon to Thurs, Woolloongabba & Inala Region

**1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)** 24/7 national sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service (phone counselling)

**DV Connect – Women's Crisis Line 1800 811 811 24**/7 phone support, accommodation and counselling referral

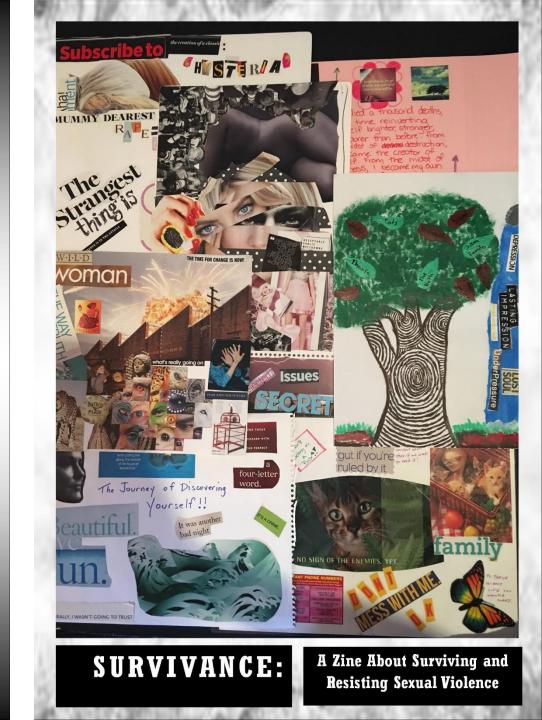
**Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital Sexual Assault Response Team (07) 3646 5207** 24/7 Service, recent Sexual Assault within 2 years of the episode

Queensland Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 010 120 7:30am-11:30pm phone support

**Immigrant Women's Support Service** (07) 3846 5400 Mon to Fri 9am to 4pm

**Zig Zag — Young Women's Resource Centre (07) 3843 1823** Sexual Assault Counselling to young women 12-25 years and housing support to women 16-25 years

Murrigunyah Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corp for Women (07) 3290 4254 9am — 5pm, Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri



### CONTENTS

**Resisting** Self Blame, Guilt and Shame through exposing myths, lies and other perpetrator tactics

**Dealing** with strong emotions— anger, grief and loss

**Building** Trust and Connections

**Reclaiming** our bodies and sexual pleasure/intimacy

# INTRODUCTION

This zine is intended for survivors, friends, and family of survivors.

This zine may contain triggering words and images. Please make sure you are in a safe space when reading.

This zine was created in May 2017 by a strong group of women who gathered together in order to understand and heal.





# Through the eyes of Pressed Flowers

What survivors of sexual assult really wish they could say to the ones that want to help

"Silence is deafening"

"I want you to see my scars, but I don't want you to see me cry"

"Listen, and HEAR me"

"I'm scared I'm contagious"

"PLEASE TELL ME YOU BELIEVE ME"

"I might tell you to go away, but I really want you here"

"It's my story - and I will choose what details I'm willing to share"

"Sometimes I just don't know how to ask for help"

# Cactus

are a bit prickly;

but have enough

inside to sustain

not only

themselves,

but produce

beautiful

flowers, whose

nectar

sustains others

in very harsh circumstances.

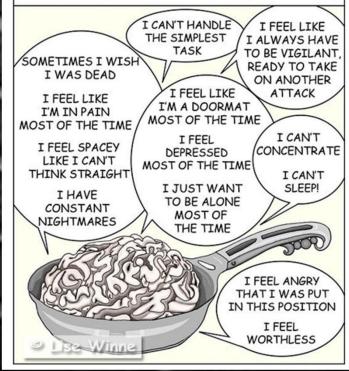
KHR

My thoughts... My feelings...



**PTSD** has many different symptoms, some people have a few, others have lots. It can make you feel **CRAZY** and alone. You might be walking along doing your grocery shopping and suddenly have an intense flashback which makes you so anxious you start sweating and freaking out.....you are sure everyone can see that you are totally crazy.......<u>but you aren't!!!</u> Your brain just needs a break, so treat yourself like a small child and be kind to

### THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON C-PTSD



SHAME you feel it, you've been dishonoured, violated, how could you let this happen?? You didn't!! It's the perpetrator/s that should feel disgrace, guilty, mortified & ashamed. It was their actions not yours.

F) C/S/M( vou are

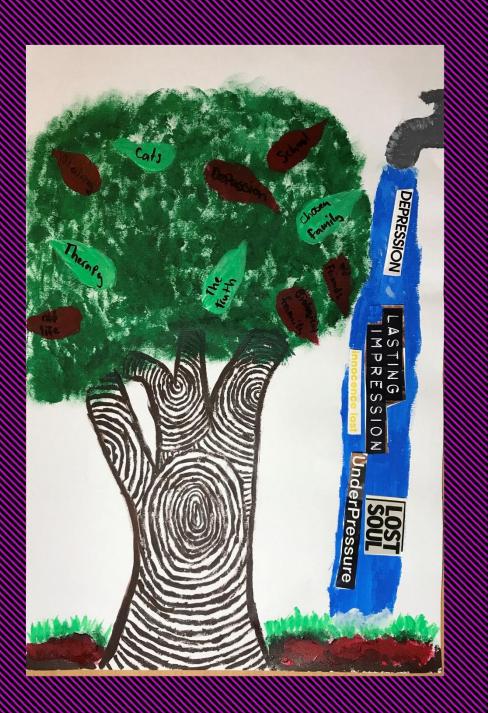
angry and rightfully so. No one should be treated this way. But not at yourself, not at society, but at the perpetrator/s and their supporters solely. It was their actions not yours.

BLAME you feel it's your fault, how could I let this happen, If only I'd . . . Again it's the perpetrator/s that's responsible. It was their actions not yours.

NAME your perpetrator, there are people & places that can help you make the person accountable for their actions. The system may not be perfect, and it hurts to discover there are people you must remove from your life, but it helps and it's important, essential to surround yourself with the ones that can help you heal.

RECLAIM yourself, let go of the SHAME it's not yours to bear; let go of the Blame it's not yours to endure. Hold on to the FLAME and let it light the way; not be so strong that it blinds you to the exceptional person you know you are. KHR 17

et our voices and collective EXPERIENCES SHINE forth This light will reach dark and vastplaces Stir hearts and minds and has potential to EADCHANGE ~ BLAZE AHEAD~





Silence is Golden . . . Duct Tape is Silver . . The honest Truth . . . PAINFUL ! ! Do not be gagged!! Rape & Sexual Assault are Despicable Acts.!!

Sex is a life changing, life giving experience. It opens your soul, it allows you to discover yourself, gives you trust & faith in another person outside of yourself. Helps you grow, outwardly, inwardly. Like a tree whose branches reach for the heavens & roots stretch out wide & deep beneath the earth. Strong, Stable, Majestic, Magnificent. Isn't that what we all want for each other & ourselves?? It is what we all deserve!! It is what we all should revere!!

#### Dear Dr

I'm writing this down as I think it will be easier for me to explain my issues than trying to tell you about them. For quite some time now I have been struggling with life in general. I am not sleeping well, I have many dark nightmares, get headaches, have feelings of worthlessness, am constantly teary and I need help to get out the this dark hole I have found myself in. I have a wonderful partner & two beautiful boys that deserve so much more than they are getting from me. I have isolated myself from my family and friends (who wants to be around someone who is sad all the time, and If I'm not sad I'm angry) Angry because they don't care enough to ask what's wrong. But even if they did, I can't tell them what's wrong because if I do I don't know what the consequences will be. I've baulked at telling a GP as this now gets on my record, it's not anonymous like Bravehearts, or BRISSC. I'm scared of people pitying me or blaming me or worse sending me away or taking my children from me. Who can comprehend the abuse of an innocent child by the ones who should be their protectors, their main role model. How can anyone see a child as a sexual being, and how do you fix/help someone who feels so broken. The foundation of my soul is damaged & I need help to fix it. I need to be the happy life loving person I want to be, the great role model for my children whose foundation I want to be strong and stable. I want to be strong & stable.

The past:-

- Sexual abuse from my father from 0 16
- Mother dies when I'm 17 brothers are 15 & 13
- Mother caught father abusing but did nothing (told him to stop he threatened to leave)

What has made the past an issue now:-

- Hey Dad court case, Rolf Harris, Michael Jackson media coverage
- Movies & TV shows with plots around child abuse (Sunshine & Oranges)
- Estranged from father as he showed no respect for my partner
- Did not attend 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party for father in Jan 2012 organised by brother which has now estranged his family from mine.
- Falling out with partner's family (Nov 2013) (Mum, Step Father & 3 sisters) no support there!!
- My children heading towards adolescence (10 & 12)

Things that need fixing:-

- Sleep/Nightmares (I stay up late to try and avoid dark thoughts)
- Sadness/ Teary (I cry at TV adds, songs on the radio EVERY DAY)
- Self-Worth / Confidence (feelings of the people I love would be better off without me)







Dear I remember that night asclear as glass. remember what I was wearing + I havent worn that skirt since. I remember pitying you on your divorce. I remember trying to push you aff I saying no. stop. but you fidn't remember my future being roined, my friends Stopped talking to me, my sleeping pattern got fucked up. I remember wonting to peel my skin off. I remember you comming on my face. remember EVER ITHING, yet all I want is too forget. hate going outside, I hategoing to all the places used to gotog incose you're There. I have how you still offect my life even after all these years. have trouble sleeping at night. I have Frouble with sen. I gained GO kg after you raped me because thought people wouldn't notice me. I'd be less of a target. hate you you destroyed my sense of safety In my own home. HATE YOU HATEYOU. 1 HATEYOU. 1HATEYOU.

Dread coils in my belly, tendrils drifting throughout my entire body until I'm thoroughly frozen. So brimming with fear I want to run screaming. This simple task is never simply simple for me. It's fraught with demons that I have to overcome. *Every. Single. Time.* I wish I could erase your stamp from my mind and body. Not be triggered by a regular doctor's appointment. And you'd think that 19 years would be long enough to 'get over it'. But no. Nope. Nah uh. Nah mate.

#### Yeah

I gather my courage in steps and stages. Acknowledge my feelings of fear and fright. And I say it's ok to be scarred - oops! - scared. Everyone needs to see the doctor sometimes. But every time I do I relive the waking nightmare that was my appointment with you. *You asked me for permission to examine me.* As I was locked in those stirrups you invaded my body. You deliberately hurt me and got off on it. On me. It has taken ages for me to comprehend that whilst I consented to a medical examination *I did not consent to your violation of me.* 

What you did changed the course of my life. Time and again I break apart. I pick up the pieces. I've followed this pattern for so many years now I wonder - what will it take for me to truly feel safe?

Reporting you for the crime you committed 19 years ago.





SIt's not your FAULT
you have a right to FEEL
to search and FIND
Jyour inner FRIEND
to gain your FREEDOM
You've been through HELL
and it really HURTS
Maybe this can HELP
to give you HOPE
& enable you to HEAL

Legs tensing, pulling.

Like an instinctive grip

To where I am

As I Freeze

Yet flooding-

Inundated with a suite

Of nipping, gnawing, burning

A response too body's

Memories of hurt, pain, betrayal

Systematically shutting down

Limb by limb

Until so still

I hardly breathe

Yet internally—my mind

Is screaming

Silence at my lips

Molten through my hips

As stomach churns

And I know I will be sick '

I curse

The one who trapped

A piece of my soul Layered in my mind. My eyes see slightly Although blurred as my senses prickle

COLD.

How can it be that with a fire burning deep

Outside I freeze .

#### Cold.

How can it be that when my daughter speaks to me I hear But cannot speak.

Cold.

My eyes dart

Panicked

And she doesn't understand that it is not she who brought me here

It fact it was she who kept me here.

A flash.

It was <u>she</u> who kept me here I pause ;





Those tears are not from here question But a sign I'm thawing out. Slowly. Slowly. The clash of hear and cold And now I see A little clearer Despite the tears That drop and drip and run. "Mummy, are you ok?" She asks with eyes wide as she reaches out to me

arms she comes

I smile as a tear meets my lips

And whisper

"It's OK to cry my dear."

She nuzzles in to the gap between my shoulder and my neck

I focus on the feeling of her Breathing beneath my hand Across her back I match her breath and hum A song we share

n song we sna.

I made it.

I made it back to her.

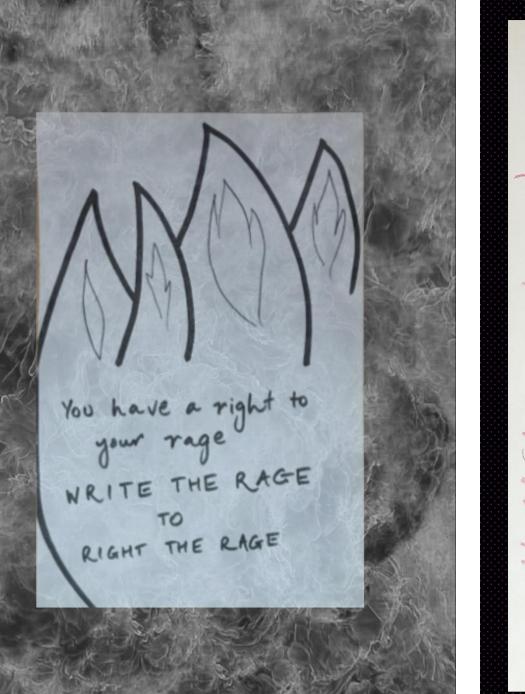
In mind and spirit.

She keeps me here once more

A siren singing me to life when all

Else would very nearly down me .

**JEMS 2017** 









Buggerlugs and her twin sister lost their Mum due to a car accident. She was very tiny when she came into my care. She survived through 2 hourly bottle feeds around the clock. She was very frightened when she first came into my care.

#### Trust. Friendship. Family. Love.

#### **Happiness.** Connection.

She now is very loving and even tries to clean my sores. Buggerlugs just loves a cuddle and to chill. In my little girl's drey (home) she now has her twin sister along with an older sister and a new guy in her life.

Buggerlug's favourite food would have to be grapes and apple. She spends her evenings learning to climb all the fresh leaf that has been collected for her and the other fur babies. But overall Buggerlugs just loves to spend time with Mum (me) having cuddles and holding Mum's finger.

My message to others is that no matter where you have come from or what has happened you can be loved...and there is an important person for someone out there no matter if they have fur or not! Now because of a kind human taking these 4 Ringtail Possums, they have a future...a family that will be together for the rest of their lives.



#### Withholding judgement

"I realised that I have developed ideas about people I don't even know. Listening to the stories of other survivors has helped me to learn to check myself. Everyone has something to share and this adds value to my life." (JA)

#### **Practical strategies**

"I don't ask for help because I don't have the words, so E's strategy for communicating by text message – her non-verbal communication is such a smart way to ask for help." (S)

#### **Resisting power**

"I can relate to the colour of power, it says you are not going to break me, seeing the little girl in red, resisting her grandfather's power...She fought through the courts and exposed him, this made me feel like I could report mine. It's daunting, intimidating but still important." (S)

#### **Breaking from isolation**

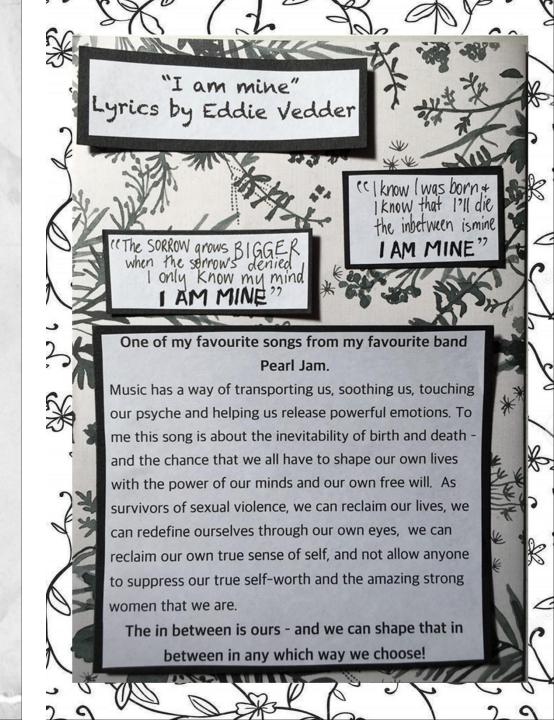
"Being here in this group makes me aware I'm not alone, and that is a powerful experience" (A)

"I think I'll try picking up a romance novel, I can relate, the feeling of not being alone." (B)

#### Notes:

"Telling our stories in ways that makes us stronger" (2001) is the title of a book from Barb Wingard and Jane Lester.

This is a collective narrative process using 'outside witness practices'. The words are from survivors of the group. The document was compiled and edited by BRISSC workers.



#### HOW STORIES OF SURVIVANCE (SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE) MAKES US STRONGER

In listening to these stories, many of us were deeply moved. These stories not only resonated with us, they have inspired to in so many ways to live our lives fully.

#### Appreciating the struggle

"It warms my heart to hear how resilient J is in dealing with adversity and how she upheld her ethics." (B)

"It makes me realise that we can go through hell and still be this beautiful woman. Invisibility and armour." (E)

"In listening to her story, I saw a boxer, as a fighter takes hits – you're up there, I'm not going to take this anymore." (E)

"While listening to E, it amazes me that she still trusts herself, it amazes me that she sees the good in people. I think she is strong." (JA)

"JA being a mother to her brothers is a testament to her strength as a woman, I can see the heartbreak, selflessly loving and struggling" (S)

#### Supported our own healing journeys

" I am at the beginning of my own healing journey. There is [in hearing S's story] a huge sense of relief that mirrors some of my experience since I started remembering. I think I need to be open to different forms of healing, value different modalities of healing" (A)

"Listening to J's story encourages me to do more self-reflection and find my own inner strength". (E)

"In listening to X, I have been given permission to feel" (J)

"I was captivated by the message that it's very important to help others...I went to court to help others and through this I realised it helped me when my husband said 'you seem to like yourself now". (JA)

my body and I are still getting to know each other

Trauma made us strangers

unable to talk to each other, unable to meet eyes in the mirror

but slowly, day by day, we're getting better healing

one day we'll sit and have coffee ... and start over

#### **Openness to love**

"I am a strong woman. I survived something horrible and yet I still have the capacity to let people into my life

willingly, and I refuse to let them win ever again. I want to to love and to trusting people." (E)

#### **Reclaiming my** body

"I have developed 7 skills that have helped me to reclaim by body: perception, judgement, honesty, ambition, courage, resilience and invisibility." (J)

### WAYS WE ARE **RECLAIMING OUR** LIVES FROM THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

#### to feel "I'm given myself permission to feel" (X)

"Reading romance. reading of love opened me up, even be, and will be, open though I was a book snob." (S)

#### **Reclaiming my** body

"I had a meltdown during my son's birth and experienced so much rage. I needed to be celibate for a while... I am now ok with touch, nature Giving permission heals, being in the forest alone, chanting, sacred dance classes helped." (S)

#### Dancing

"Western medicine helps but dancing shows it can change brain matter, dancing with only women present, being enveloped by women is healing." (S)

#### Learning to trust and using non-verbal communication

"In December 2015, I met my current partner. Our first date we sat under the stars for 6 hours just talking. It took three dates and I told him my history, he was so angry - not at me, at the fact men had done this to me, over and over again. For the first time ever, I felt safe. He's stayed through all these irrational things I've done, and that's all I wanted. Someone who wouldn't leave. Someone who wouldn't hurt me. I still don't have my trust with him 100%, I have trouble telling him when I feel depressed or suicidal, because I don't want to upset him or worry him, but I'm working on it in nonverbal ways - I text him a certain picture." (E)



## Motion is Lotion!! Love & nurture the body you

have. Challenge it (Not Punish). Sweat opens your body, releasing toxins cleansing your system. Movement makes you focus on the present. Breathe, Smile, be Grateful, be Proud, be YOU!! KHR 17



### "Telling Our Stories In Ways That Make Us Stronger"

There are very few spaces where survivors feel safe enough to tell their stories. Over the course of 7 weeks, we engaged in an 'outsider-witness' process, as a way of telling and honouring our sacred stories. These stories covered themes such as self-blame, shame, anger, sexuality and body image.

As survivors, we have had to survive not only the act of sexual violence, but also many other forms of oppression and injustices. This includes but is not limited to homelessness, victimblaming, poverty, exploitation, and poor treatment within the medical and legal systems. To deal with the pain with these injustices some of us have used/abused alcohol, repressed our memories or bottled our feelings.

Reaching out for help when we are struggling can be so hard. As A puts it, we hold "the guilt of making people feel uncomfortable". These barriers are compounded by a rape culture and society thinks we are just "damaged goods", liars or attention seekers.

But in the shadows of sexual violence, we have discovered that we are not defeated nor 'damaged goods'. We are a collective of women, with many skills, talents, and wisdoms. As T. asserts, "We count, we matter". We hope that our hard-won knowledge that has been gained through adversity can make a significant contribution to the lives of others experiencing similar hardships. By telling our stories, we hope that our suffering has not been for nothing.

# A poem... about healing, and feelings and stuff....

grow stronge

To build courage à self esteem.

0 (.01)

3456

10

Mother takes me for a shopping spree Proof that soon a lady I will be But then you come and take something from me. I cried. I always cry.

Morning breaks, the birds announce the dawn Into my room you creep, I am now warned Laying silently, the tears burn deep. I freeze I learn to freeze

Confusion sets in now, as my best friend Shame, disgust, all my accompaniments Never will I be whole within again I cry I don't want to cry. .

Innocence has gone, I've grown too fast Childhood is over in a flash Taking responsibility too young I cried I always cry

Days and weeks and years, they come and go Loneliness feel like it's all I'll ever know Mother calls me frigid. She won't know. I cried. It burns to cry.

Strength one day, I want for this to end You arrive and I say I will not bend Let you know, you cannot touch me again He cries. And so do I.

Then a mother one day I'm to be. Swear that near to her, you'll never be. Lioness inside comes forth from me I fight. I'll always fight.

Anchored now to her, I'll always be Picking up the pieces they don't see Strength, resilience and striving to be I thrive I've learned to thrive

Working everyday to find some way To heal these wounds that no one else can see Surviving, thriving, growing everyday I smiled Now I can smile.

Someone told me I should forgive today Regret would come if you should pass away But I can't look upon your face in any case I cried Why did I cry

Healing is a journey that twists and bends I pick myself up and stand again In myself I know that this cycle can end I speak I stand up and speak. JEMS



I HOPE BY SHARING, YOU WILL NOT FEEL SO ALONE, I WILL NOT FEEL SO ALONE, I HOPE WE AS A GROUP CAN MOVE TOWARD CHARGING OUR WAY OF LIVING TODAY AND TOMORROW