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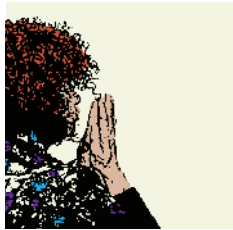
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FOREWORD

Tracy Phillips



Here at Bonnie's we hear stories every day but the thing that never ceases to amaze us is what these stories tell us about women's resilience, and their ability to dig deep and move on.

Stories play a huge role in the work we do. We listen to stories, we tell them and we constantly see their transformative power in supporting change. When women come together in our groups, their stories resonate across age, culture and circumstances. They'll talk about the turning points: the moment they knew enough was enough, the people they found to help, the strangers who made a difference. Or the first time they turned the key on the door of their own safe home.

Each woman's experience is uniquely her own and so to share it, particularly for the benefit of others, is a huge act of generosity.

Many readers will see themselves (or women they know) in this collection: they'll recognise the violence but they will also see new possibilities. It's our hope that this book will spark both recognition and action towards stronger, violence-free lives.

Bonnie's is the second women's refuge ever established in Australia. We were founded way back in 1974. But every new story we hear helps us understand

and do more. And do it louder. This transmission of feeling, power and knowledge is what makes this storybook so important. We are definitely all getting stronger!

Thanks to all the partners who saw the importance of giving to the project and recognised the valuable contribution that it can make. Thanks to – NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV), Parramatta City Council, Uniting Newpin, Sydney Community Foundation, Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF), Bonnie Support Services Ltd., and Western Sydney University.

The idea for the book was conceived by Liz Reedy and the partnership with Moya Sayer-Jones, from Only Human Communication, made it happen. It wouldn't be such a rich and valuable book without these two women.

We have all gained from it.

Bonnie's is honoured and privileged to be the custodian of these stories that the women have so generously shared.

Tracy Phillips
Executive Officer
Bonnie Support Services

DEENA'S STORY

Be loved

Saying goodbye is a good thing. You've got to keep your head up and keep moving. When your spirit's being knocked around and you're living a life of emptiness, that's not a life.

I first ran away from home when I was 16. I was a lone wolf, out to discover the world. I hitchhiked down to Sydney and got straight into a relationship with a man ten years older than me.

I walked into this wild pub called the Empress Hotel and there he was. He just seen me coming. Within a month, I had been assaulted by him twice. Stitches in the lip: Saint Vincent's Hospital. He knocks me down but I get up and I just keep moving.

The Aboriginal Medical Service paid my plane fare home to Brissy. I get off the plane and my parents are there. My dad's crying. Three months out of home and there I was, back with a busted mouth. How could it have been any other way?

Mum and Dad were deadset crazy. Dad was a habitual criminal, so he was in and out of jail.

There was nothing that I didn't hear as a child. I knew about Mum's affairs, I knew how it felt when she got rejected by a man, I knew how it felt when Dad was the worst bastard on the earth. I had to ring the police on him more than once but I was always spoon-fed, 'Dad loves ya'. That was one thing every one of us agreed. Through rain and storm, Dad loved me. How he loved me is another thing.



NINA'S STORY

The Tables Turned

I was born and raised in Fiji... Back in our country there was no awareness about domestic violence then. In my heart I knew what he was doing was wrong but I felt so helpless, embarrassed and ashamed.

I met my husband as a 16-year-old school girl. We married when I was 17, and I had my first child a year later.

When I returned home after the birth, my neighbour took me aside. She said my husband had brought other women home while I was in the hospital. By the time

I was 23, two weeks after the birth of my third child, I was diagnosed with syphilis. But my husband's infidelity was just the beginning.

He immigrated to Australia alone. But, not long after, there was a military coup in Fiji and he sent for me and the children. It was in Australia that the jealous rages began. He accused me of having affairs and started verbally abusing me, hitting me, punching me and sexually abusing me. I was just receiving. Receiving and being quiet. Back in our country there was no awareness about domestic violence, then. In my heart I knew what he was doing was wrong but I felt so helpless, embarrassed and ashamed. He tortured me for 22 years and I never told a single person what he did to me. Then one day I just couldn't hold it in any more.

It was after my mother died. We were back in Fiji for the funeral ceremony, which in our culture takes 13 days. Everybody was together in this little house – my husband and I and our five children, aunts, uncles, cousins, my brother and his friends – and he's demanding sex. There's no privacy in that house and I'm mourning for my mother and he's getting angry. He storms out of the room and in front of all my family he says, 'That's it. When we go back to Australia, you're out of the house. You're not going to stay with me!'



That's when the bomb blasted and I spoke up for the first time in my life.

This was the moment I started to take my life back. I couldn't put up with it anymore.

KELLI'S STORY

Soul Woman

I had a loving childhood but it had difficult aspects that made me vulnerable to a predator like Dean. I was used to secrecy, and that's what he preyed on.

I grew up in the northern suburbs of Sydney. There was Mum, Dad, older brother and me – beautiful home, elite private schools. Dad was in publishing and Mum was an interior designer.

Dad's mother was bipolar – she was terribly unwell and tried to suicide five times. Mum's mother was hugely abusive, and Mum was in an abusive relationship with an alcoholic before she met Dad. Because they both came from painful and

horrific backgrounds, they just wanted to make the perfect family, as a couple. It didn't quite turn out like that.

My brother is on the autism spectrum and has recently been diagnosed as bipolar. He was always extremely difficult in many ways, and I was seen as the 'golden girl'. The feeling was always, 'If only we had two like you'. I was just a normal kid though; getting along with everyone, going to parties, hanging out with my friends. I wasn't special, but compared to my brother, I was easy. There was this weight of responsibility on me to be perfect and carry the dream. That meant being the good girl, being happy, never crying in front of them (it got to a point where I just stopped crying), and being the peacemaker of our house.

The world we inhabited was so privileged, so out of touch with reality, and my private school bred that. It was very gendered. I wanted to do drums but no, 'women don't do that kind of thing'. We did ballet. Girls didn't do bands either. I learnt piano. In my friendship group, for example, no-one's mum worked except mine.

The boys' schools bred a very similar fucked-up thing. The boys we hung out with were all 'women-in-the-kitchen' types. None of their mums worked, they went to Pilates instead – keeping thin and blonde and beautiful for their husbands to fuck. It's just so gross, really. Everyone seemed shiny on the outside and dead inside.



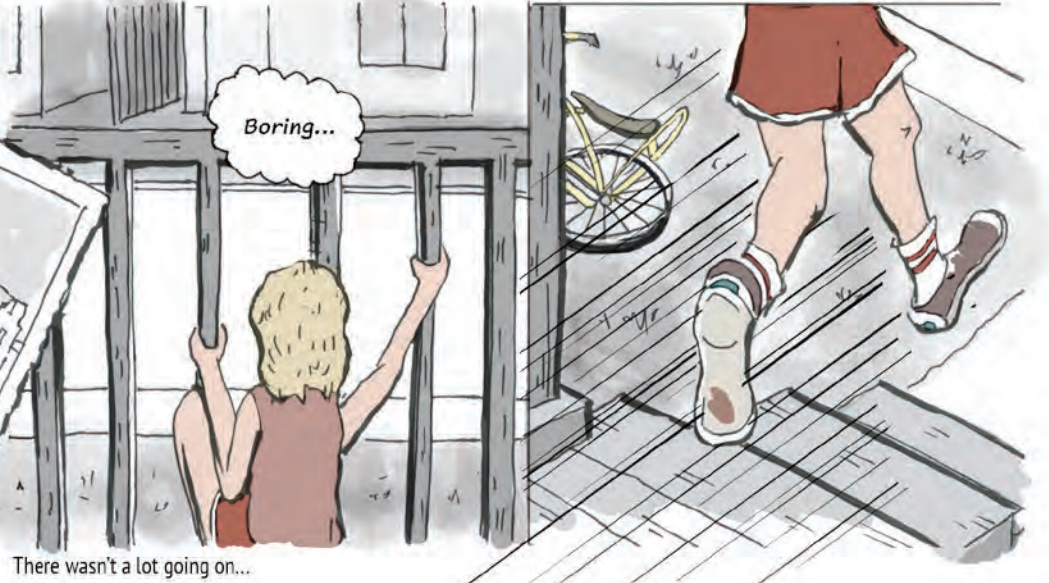
HETTY'S STORY

THE ROAD AHEAD





I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney in the 1970s.



There wasn't a lot going on...



Mum loved me, but she couldn't express her feelings. She just couldn't show emotion.



And this became our family way.



If you were emotional, you were weak.



Of course there were challenges along the way because my journey wasn't about finding someone else – my journey was about finding me. I had to be my own person, and find my own way in the world.

although I hated it to begin with, I ended up falling in love with that place. I met some really nice women from different backgrounds and cultures and my world started to open up. At the same time, John's world was closing down.

A few months after I'd left, he got up one morning, spoke to the neighbour, who said he seemed happy, hooked up the gear, and gassed himself in his car. I can tell you the moment he died because I felt him go. I was in the city with one of the girls I had struck up a friendship with, and we'd gone into this restaurant and were just about to eat, when I knew something profound had happened. I jumped up and left. By the time I got back to Glebe, John had died.

I fell apart then. I thought, 'I am totally responsible. If only I had stayed with him'. Then out of the blue I got a phone call from an old friend. She said, 'Carolyn, this is not your fault'. She talked me through all the horrible things she remembered. That call came at exactly the right time.

I faced a lot of blame for John's death from my own family. My mother went a bit mental and my brother barred me from the funeral. I remember going in to see my dad, who was in his room just lying on the bed and I said, 'Dad, I don't know what to do'. He said, 'Carolyn, you do what you need to do. You do what's right'. That's all he said but that support was enough. It enabled me to move forward. I ended up going back and staying at the refuge for a couple of months until I got a housing commission place.

I didn't speak to my mother for two years after John died. She'd been so enmeshed in that relationship from the very beginning. She would always have private conversations with him about our life and our marriage. I really needed space to find myself before I could connect with her again, and it was a very strained relationship for a long time.

