

SPEAK OUT!

edition no.1 - EMPOWERMENT

for survivors by survivors

the power of hindsight

here he comes
there he goes
this time i run
that time i froze
bated breath
garden green
that time i shhh
this time i scream
weeping willow
thorn in side
that time i stood
this time i hide
strength to change
how to move on
that time i shrank
this time i am strong

- Lucy 28

The most radical thing
you can do is take care
of YOU because there
will only ever be one
YOU.

Solidarity

Me one, me too, me three
we are not free until we are all free
what happened to you
what happened to me
cannot go unseen
we are not free until we are all free
adding my voice to the conversation
I will not be silenced
don't silence me
I will speak
I will be heard
we are not free until we are all free
this is solidarity.

Andreena Leeanne
a poem taken from her book Charred
- available at www.andreena.co.uk

nature is healing

i wanted to listen to the birds
and to the sea
i wanted to feel the wind and i to lay in
the sun
but you took that from me that day.

the birds turned to your voice
the sea into to your laugh
the wind into your breath
and the sun into your hands

and every time i felt them, it was you
until now.

because today i sat on the beach and
i heard the waves beat and the birds
fly around

and the wind pricked my face and the
sun had my skin

and for the first time it wasn't you
because i refuse to let you take that
any longer.
you lost your control
and the earth took hers back

ezra elijah-noah

Tears Made of Molten Lava

I once knew a girl
with doubt being the feathered threads
that crisscrossed her fragile heart together.

TEARS MADE OF MOLTEN LAVA

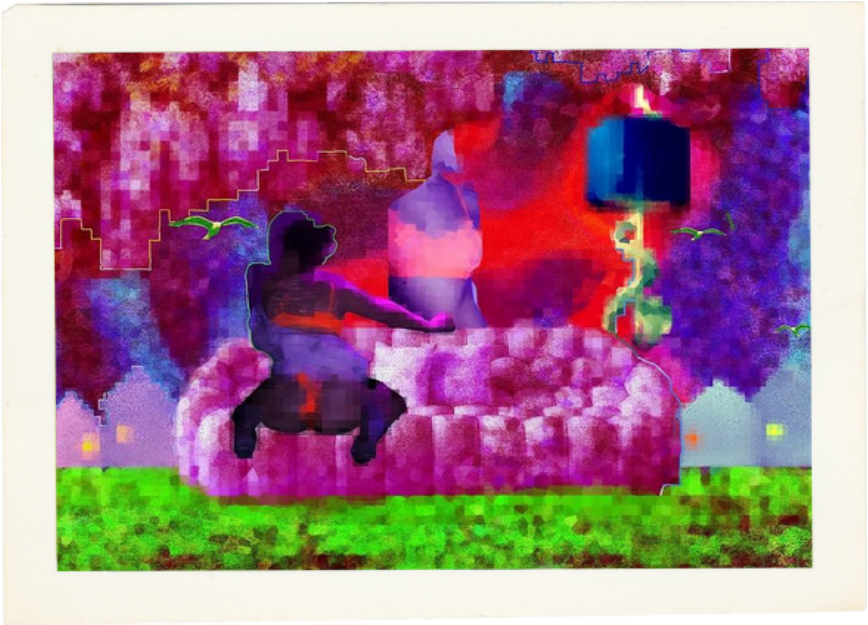
I once new a girl
that grew tired of being called
nice,
sweet,
obedient,
she craved a vivacious fire
that would burn her moulded personality
and leave her new descriptors in the ashes:
Confident.
Emotional.
Powerful.

Now, I know a woman
who emerged from a blazing inferno,
with a smile draped across her tear-stricken face.
And the flare she attaches to her wit
helps her thrive with creative passions.
The flames that once scorched her skin
gently caress her assertive stance,
and glow in the amber dusted embers
of her diffused anger.

I know a woman
whose emotional depth is a sapphire ocean
but she has built her own boats to stay afloat.
Her vulnerability is no weakness, and,
much like broken glass,
she is powerful in her pieces,
and more beautiful when the shards
capture the celestial hues of the sun.

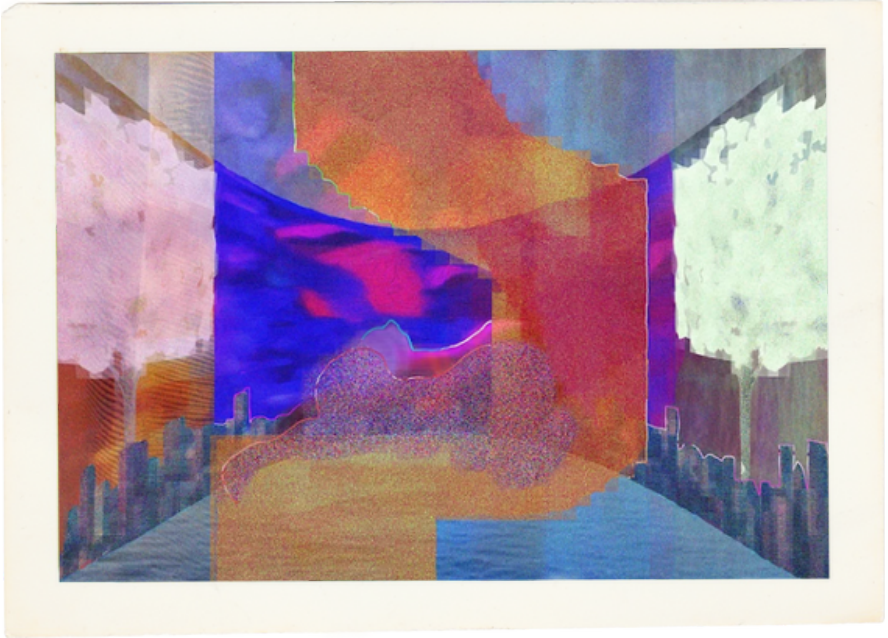
I once new a girl,
with trauma in her dewy eyes
who grew into a woman
that saw her potential,
dropped a match,
and watched her empowered self
ignite.

Libby Jenner
Taken from their book
“Wings Unfurled”



by Naomi K





by Naomi K



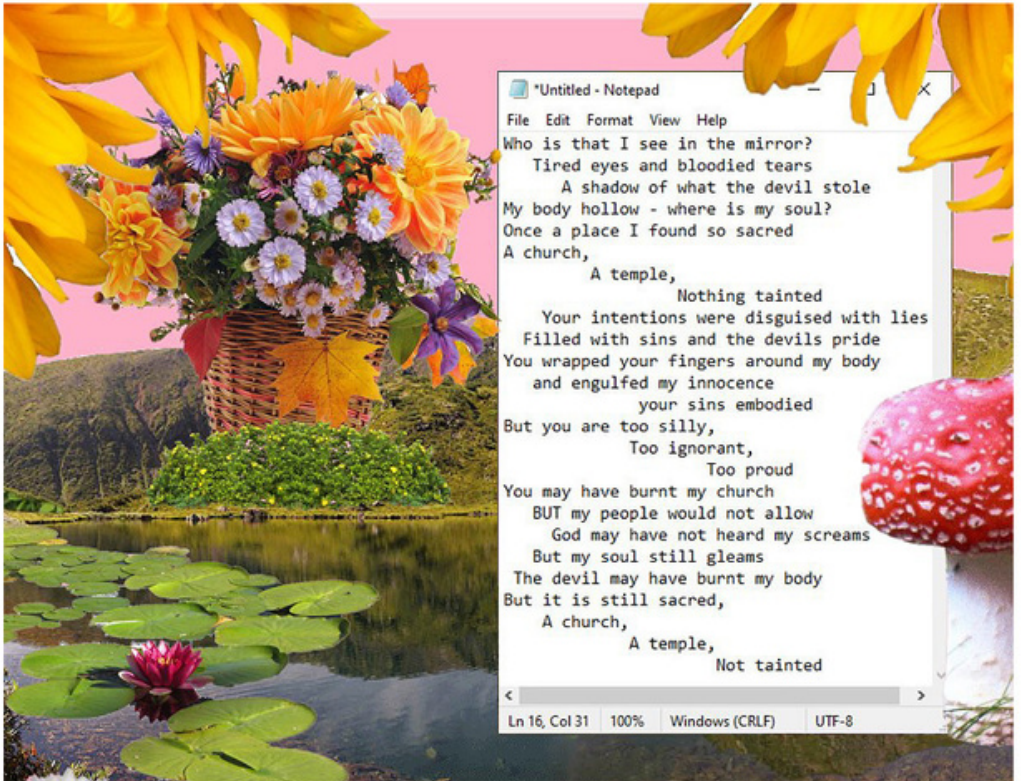


stay sweet acid baby

Haiku's Help

Just one drunken night
Changes my life forever
Now i try to heal

Yesterday I saw
A bird on my window sill
a message of hope



Stay Sweet Acid Baby

if you are reading this, you are alive.

They say that when you lose someone, you can't stop yourself forgetting what they looked like. After my grandfather passed away, it became a tradition to reconstruct him, alive, in my mind, but within weeks I had lost the sound of his voice, and within months I could not place the lines of his face.

After what happened to me happened, I thought I had lost someone else. I stumbled back to student accommodation, ignoring the blue skies and the birdsong, and opened the door to her room to find her bed not slept in, her laptop open to a half-finished essay, her wall lined with photographs of her with her friends and family. It was a cruel joke, for that morning to have been so beautiful. I thought that she had died – I had only taken her place. Yet, the sun kept shining. The world laughed.

I spent a while struggling to articulate what had happened to me – to my doctors, my friends, my family. It took me even longer to realise that the most important person who I had to disclose to, was that same girl in the photographs, who had once had such a bright future and was scared of giving it up. Who was angry at me, for making all the wrong decisions. So, I sat down with her one day, in the park, and I told her what had happened, and what it was called, and what we were doing about it. I told her she could trust me to take care of us. That we were safe, and our dreams were safe. This journey was just a little different from what we were expecting.

I hear people talk about my rapist, sometimes. I wish I could reach into that corner of my mind and project the memories in front of their eyes. But the evidence was lost years ago. My rapist washed the bedsheets and closed the house. I have nothing to show, except for the screaming of synapses that will grow steadily softer, and the deep, shuddering cries that will always dry out eventually. I have made my peace with it. I am more than a piece of evidence. I am more than a witness to a crime. I am still a granddaughter. Every gentle memory of love outweighs everything else. Every time I have been held softly outweighs everything else. I look at my sisters' faces and memorise every line. I engrave the voices of my friends on the vinyl of my mind.

Nowadays, when I think of walking home that morning, I do not remember the streets I went down. When I remember sitting at my desk, starting to type, I could not tell you what the essay was about. What I do remember is, for a split moment, noticing the sunshine streaming through the leaves, shining across the collage on the wall, how quiet it was outside. I recognise the girl in the photographs. I know that I never died.

Nicola Sharp (N)

Empowerment

A word we hear so often
But one with many meanings
See, what I find empowering
May differ from your understanding.

Every day
Life chipped my confidence away
Piece by piece
Stripping me bare
Until there was nothing there.
I look back at the once fearless little girl
Forever climbing trees
Constantly had grazed knees
She was as wild as her red hair
A “lion’s mane” they called her crazy curls
That never stayed in their bows
She wasn’t very good at doing as she was told
And it wasn’t long before she started hearing,
“Little girl, you’re far too bold.”

Confidently speaking her mind
Adventure found round every corner
So many things she wanted to say
Please listen to the excitement and tales from my
day!
“You’re such a chatterbox.
Sit still.
Be quiet.
Be more ladylike.”

She had an imagination for days
With aspirations so high
When asked, what do you want to be when you
grow up?

She wanted to be a vet, a nurse, a painter, a
doctor, a dancer, a writer, a footballer, a teacher,
a policeman, a firefighter,

Her plans changed daily
“Little girl, that’s so silly
You can’t be all those things
And some of those jobs are just for boys!
Pick one that’s achievable.
You need something more believable.
A job more suitable for a lady”
What a ridiculous question to pose to a four
year old anyway...

That little girl was empowered
Fuelled only by her own defiant energy
But as life’s cruel hands
Robbed her of innocence
And the songbook of society
Instructed what she could and couldn’t be
Her reckless abandonment for life, vanished
Not even six, the spark in her eye,
extinguished.
Fearless-ness disappeared,
Leaving her only with fear.
Her chatterbox ways
Replaced with silence for days.
Better to be quiet.
Don’t make a sound.
Don’t get told off for being too loud.

It’s hard to believe I was once that little girl
But alas, I was born into a community
That didn’t hold a space for me.
“Sit down.
Be quiet.
Your role is subservient.
Follow the man
Do as you’re told
Why do you keep trying to be so bold?”
Oh, the events that were yet to unfold
The cycle of abuse shaping me into a people
pleaser

Adopting the role of peacemaker
Making myself smaller and smaller.
Suffering in silence, without a place of safety
As more and more events, stripped away my
identity.
Breaking free from one abuser
Falling into the new arms of one after another
This is all I'd ever known
Raised to believe
The problem starts and ends with me.
It couldn't be their behaviour
No, they're not the issue
Silly little girl, it's you.

So now you ask what I find empowering?
It's the arms of women who lifted me.
Fierce minds who broke through years of
conditioning
They kept speaking
Even when I wasn't listening.
They stood in the wings
Patiently awaiting
The day my voice finally broke free
"I need you to rescue me."
They gifted me their strength
When I had none

But this way of life they were demonstrating
Was so far from what I'd ever known
That overwhelming anxiety
Beckoned me back towards the hands of cruelty
At least with that, there was a certainty
I knew what to expect.
The freedom these women were presenting
Was all too terrifying
But they carried me through the uncertainty
And now, I'm living so much more authentically.
That's empowering.

With the help of those stronger than I,
Slowly, I see the return of my fearlessness
But make no mistake, it's still a work in progress,
Only a year ago, I was still consumed with
hopelessness.

So I hope as you read these words today
You'll find solace in the fact that there is a different
way

Those baby steps you're taking
That's a new life in the making.

For me, it started small

First the return of my lion's mane

No longer do I work to keep those wild curls tamed

And slowly as I looked in the mirror

The face that looked back at me was becoming more
familiar...

For me, changes first came to my exterior

But as I presented more like myself

A strength started returning

Now I'm relearning;

How to live

How to laugh

Hell, even how to cry

Reclaiming speaking my mind

How empowering it can be,

To start living undeniably, as me.

Elise B Nicks

My Island by Caroline Brunne

Have you ever heard your inner child speak? Have you let yourself be vulnerable enough to really tune into their hushed, whispered voice, to really listen to what they are saying? My inner child has repeated clear and specific words to me for most of my life.

The whispered voice of my inner child came to me very clearly; she would say, 'I want to go home.'

It gave me chills hearing that voice. The enormity of what was behind those five simple words. Her longing for safety, her exhaustion from remaining in a place that was dangerous, and reaching for someone, anyone, to take her away.

As we often do with children, I was quick to quiet my inner child. Shushing her and reminding her to look around. 'Weren't we already home?' I said as I pleaded with her to be quiet.

During the peak of the pandemic, in the various lockdowns that I lived through, I found myself having to create a new sense of home. I now understand that my true sense of home was already in the making. I had been collecting all the elements I needed through all of the years before 2020.

I knew I had to set boundaries and that the home I was creating for myself and my family was a sacred space. The space was in its infancy, the foundation stones were newly placed and I found it difficult to find the words to describe how important it was to me, how much I needed to protect my precious new home.

The language explaining my new home and what I yearned for came to me in a book, Glennon Doyle's 'Untamed', in a chapter aptly named Islands. It read:

'A woman becomes a responsible parent when she stops being an obedient daughter, when she finally understands that she is creating something different from what her parents created, when she begins to build her island, not to their specifications but to hers.'

When she finally understands that it is not her duty to convince everyone on her island to accept and respect her and her children, it is her duty to allow onto her island only those who already do and who will walk across the drawbridge as the beloved respectful guests they are. Decide with honour and intention what you will have on your island and what you will not, not who your non-negotiables are but what they are. Do not lower the drawbridge for anything other than what you have decided is permitted on your island, no matter who is carrying it.'

In creating my island, I have become a responsible parent, not only to my children, but also to my inner child. The child whose whisper of wanting to go home had become an ear-piercing scream. A cry for help, a desperate plea to be taken somewhere safe where she could be at peace. Both of us needed a safe place to grow, to be free.

When I created my island, surrounded by my husband and our children, I openly welcomed visitors. There were clearly people who could respect the sacred space I had created, honouring the values that I had chosen to build my island on. But the calls from the mainland continued, calling me back and asking me why I would not lower the drawbridge.

By not lowering the drawbridge to my parents I am modelling behaviour to my children that I wish my parents had modelled for me. I am showing them what safety and integrity look like when they are lived. I am showing them that words hold no value if they are not acted out in our truth, if they are not displayed in our lived experiences.

In living on my island with my family I am giving them the gift of me. The gift of my truest, most vulnerable self. The gift of my love.

Most of all, I am giving myself the gift of freedom.

Thank You to all the contributors for bearing their souls to help us create this beautiful collaborative piece of work. We commend the courage it takes for survivors to share themselves in this way. The vulnerability and bravery that went into this work is an example of the incomparable strength of survivors.

The Speak Out newsletter was first printed in 1990 when Survivors' Network was set up by a group of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. There are over 100 issues of Speak Out in our archive! Speak Out was a way of keeping our supporters updated about our work, as well as a vital space for survivors of sexual violence, abuse and harassment to express themselves and their experiences through articles, letters, poetry, artwork and more.

We have revived this amazing project with a brand new issue of Speak Out, transforming it into an online zine solely dedicated to showcasing the poetry, artwork, and messages of love, support, and solidarity of survivors in our community.

If you would like to contribute to our upcoming quarterly editions, please get in touch with sara@survivorsnetwork.org.uk or tap here to visit our website.