



INTERACTIVE E-ZINE | ISSUE ONE | SPRING 2020

Voices Heard

INSPIRING STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

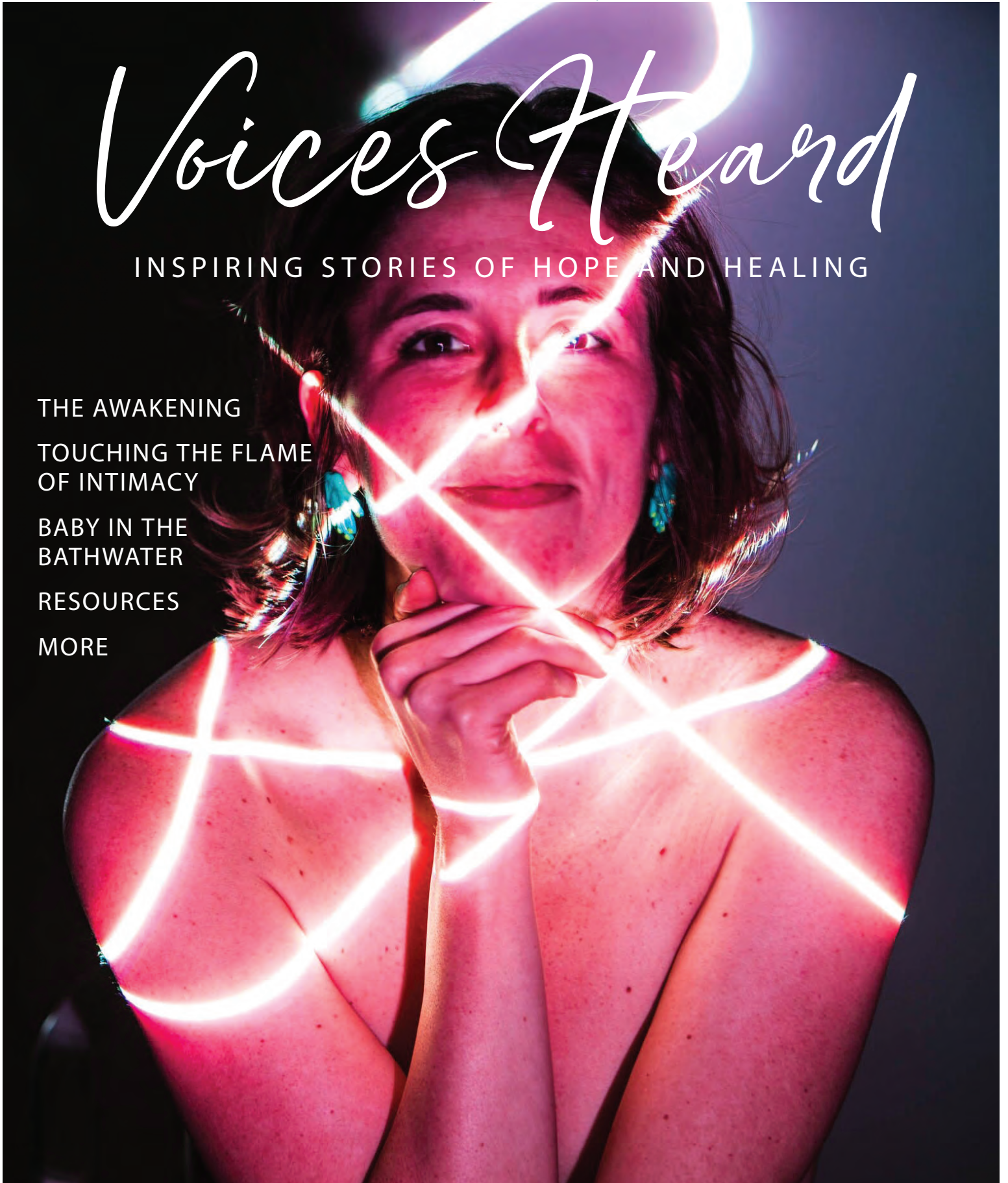
THE AWAKENING

TOUCHING THE FLAME
OF INTIMACY

BABY IN THE
BATHWATER

RESOURCES

MORE



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VOICES HEARD
ISSUE 1

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE POWER OF INTERACTIVE

The joy and power of an interactive e-Zine is exploring...

I LOVE MY PEEPS!

My peeps are survivors in every sense of the word...

VERAKERR LOPEZ

SELF PORTRAIT

My art is my soul's vomit and at times I cannot bear it...

DRU COWAN

THE AWAKENING

I once sat in darkness sick and afraid...

SHANNON JONES

TOUCHING THE FLAME OF INTIMACY

A visceral awareness passes through the audience as Shannon creates...

ANNE LAUREN

BABY IN THE BATHWATER

I couldn't remember the illness or the incest, but my bones remembered...

STEPHANIE STANFIELD

EMERGENCE

I wanted to believe that my heart stayed open throughout...



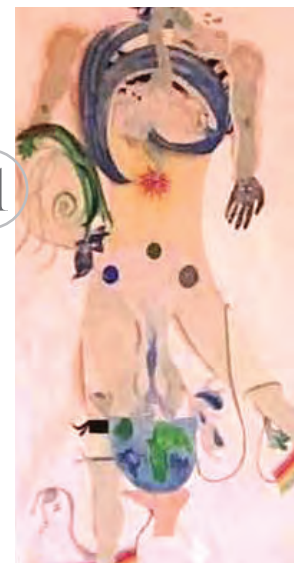
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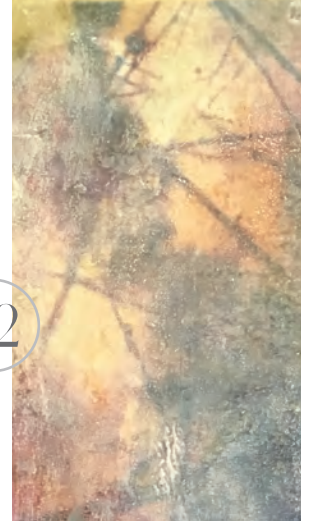
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CARI KNAUDT LAUSIER

HOPE II

I was looking out the window and noticed
a pattern from branches shadowing...

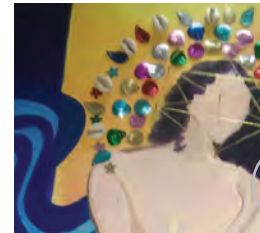
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TANYA BLACKLIGHT

MUSIC OF THE OVARIAN SPHERES

Be it dance, film, paint, jewelry, or healing
art...



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CLAIRE O'LEARY

SILENT NO MORE

Through artwork and journaling on a
deeper level, I can discover...



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KATE BOSWORTH

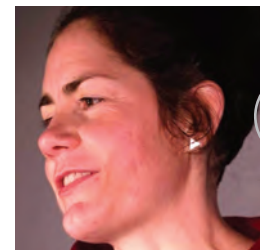
THE STORY THAT WANTS TO BE TOLD

Definitely not the right type of story
to inflict upon these poor unsuspecting
people...

JULIE HART

INCEST ENDS WITH ME

We talk about mental illness now, we talk
about alcoholism, we talk about domestic
violence, we talk about PTSD...

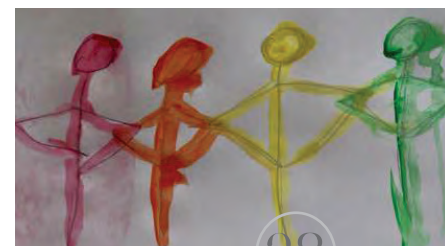


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IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS...

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Your Voice Wants to be Heard
...Needs to be Heard



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THE POWER OF INTERACTIVE



Be it visual, auditory
or kinesthetic, enjoy
learning in the way
you like best. Simply
click on an image or
highlighted copy to
enjoy more.

More than an e-Zine,
Voices Heard is an
experience.

The idea came through a meditation. I sat one morning, with cat in lap, coffee in hand and connected to my higher self, wondering what new ways I could connect with my clients, sexual abuse survivors, in a way that didn't feel triggering.

The night before, after I'd shared a story where I'd been working with a client and had been triggered. (It had taken hours to release what I had inadvertently taken on.) She suggested I write down 10 ways I could work with my clients in a creative way.

As I sat in meditation that morning, the idea came forth. "Traveling Exhibit." Now there was something I'd never have come up with on my own.

Listen as I share the story at the inaugural [**Empowered Voice Traveling Exhibit.**](#)

It became pretty clear that traveling with the exhibit this year was not going to happen when Covid-19 hit us this year. So I chose to take it online through an interactive e-Zine.

Only time will tell where or how the exhibit will evolve, but for now ...Enjoy!

The joy and power of
an interactive e-Zine is
exploring to your heart's
content. Simply click on
an image or live text to
read or see more in depth.

Listen to authors' sharing their stories on audio and video. Explore video and see the glory of story through movement. Of course, the Table of Contents is interactive. Click on the live text to get to an article, an artist's photo to gain insights about that person or artwork to peruse through additional art from that artist. You can even buy a print if you fall in love.

Oh what fun!

The inaugural issue
of *Voices Heard*. The
Empowered Voice
Interactive e-Zine
begins with sharing
inspiring stories of hope
and healing through
expressive art.

It explores the lives of the first survivors to venture out and speak up at the [inaugural Empowered Voice Traveling Exhibit](#) in April 2019. They share their stories through art, movement, video, audio, poetry and personal story.

Explore to your
heart's content.

I LOVE MY PEEPS!



*I am so blessed to
work with some of
the most courageous
women alive.*

My PEEPS are survivors in every sense of the word.

You are strong – capable. You have endured the unbearable. You have persisted in your healing. You have carried on, carried through – the tough times – and pulled out of it.

When you believed you couldn't possibly make it through one more time, you did. You made a comeback! You persevered, recovered, came through, withstood the test of time. You made the cut!

YOU have prevailed!

And now...

You have being, have place! You stand up!

You have a voice! You are heard!

What could possibly be stronger than a survivor?

Time and time again, it's been suggested to me that I not use the word survivor. "It feels weak," one says. "It feels like victim," says another. "It has a low vibration," states yet another.

I say...

It feels strong! Powerful! Brave! Courageous! Daring!

I am so blessed to work with some of the most courageous women alive.

I admit, we don't always feel courageous. (I say we because I am a survivor). Sometimes we feel small, sad, in pain, etc.

But, we are not! We have survived some of the most painful stories imaginable. Most stories, in fact, are unimaginable.

For who would imagine a father... a mother... a sibling... hurting their own flesh and blood – as young as 5 years old, 3 years old, even under 6 months.

Day after day, month after month, I hear unbearable stories of children (now adults) who have survived and defeated

their most heart-breaking stories. Yes, some still struggle.

Beyond survival, you have learned and are sharing your stories of healing and hope with others.

So that others, new survivors, know that indeed, you can get through – one moment at a time.

Know that as survivors, you are strong, powerful, brave, courageous and daring...

So that perpetrators know they will not win, they will not keep us down.

So the public understands what it's like to be a survivor. How we fight every day of our life to find our voice. To be Seen. To be heard. To be ourselves!

These are the stories (your stories) of confident, strong, brave and daring souls who are today...

VOICES HEARD!



VERAKERR LOPEZ

SELF PORTRAIT

MEDIUM: GEL PEN ON CANVAS

[See additional artwork from Vera.](#)

VERAKERR LOPEZ... Self Portrait



*My art is my soul's
vomit and at times
I cannot bear it. I
cannot seem to catch
my breath but now all
I want to do is share
and live in this vibrant
heartache. My
boulder is the emotional
weight that comes
with sexual assault.*

I've only just discovered my voice through my art. Becoming accustomed to sharing my story and finding different paths to do so is an intense release for me. Within each medium I choose for my projects, I try to flow with the tension that vulnerability and trauma allots, alongside the overwhelming amount of love I do truly carry for my life.

My art is my soul's vomit and at times I cannot bear it, I cannot seem to catch my breath but now all I want to do is share and live in this vibrant heartache. My boulder is the emotional weight that comes with sexual assault. Like Sisyphus, I must carry my traumas and adversities

harder. "Someday this pain will be useful to me," I tell myself each time I doubt myself, or when my mind just wants to shut off.

Of course with all this I cannot deny that my mental health has taken a hit and PTSD is a real thing, people! There is still much to repair. But therapy, EMDR and a zillion other outlets have gotten me to be in ease and self-love/glory as of the present.

There is still a deep wariness of the world and the humans in it, but my heart yearns deeply and desperately for the love that surrounds me through the life I have created. So I breathe out the negative mind-space and breathe in the



with me everyday. I already know that my boulders have only made me stronger, more determined, extremely creative and eager to make each woman in my life, most importantly myself, proud of overcoming this harshness by using my pain to create something incredible.

I know my story is what keeps me alive, even stronger and more motivated to strive for greatness for all survivors, but there is still a chill that wafts over me when sharing or even thinking about the men who took something from me. Though the reel that plays in my mind is mostly an every other day showing, it is now like a PSA to my psyche to overcome and fight for myself

positive mind-space. The power of other survivors, the advocacy from women and our allies and the pride I feel for being a woman/wombman, creature feature with a vagina, Latina, Central American immigrant Cali babe is just the best life I could have asked for.

My life is genuinely, insanely amazing and my body, my art, my tribe and my sustenance remind me of that. My soul feels my sisters in the world who share my pain with me as well as the gentle kiss from our Mother shedding her beautiful moonbeam light on us, cradling us like seeds in her palm watching us grow.

DRU COWAN... The Awakening

Sick and afraid
But when I opened my eyes
They spotted the Golden Gate

What is this new place?
This body? This home?
Far from the starting line
A world so alone

I once sat in darkness
Sick and afraid
But when I opened my eyes
They spotted the Golden Gate

No I decided
The memories hold true
But I can grow from the past
Shift blue feelings anew

Ah presence
Word of the day
The scariness my body
Dissociated away

Trauma in mind
In search of healing
I didn't know I needed
What's this I'm feeling?

Remembering history
Is the marker that holds me
Down when the tide rises up
So high that I can't see

Everyone tells me
Life's enjoying each moment
But what's real anymore
It seems imagined or God-sent

I don't get it
How did I grow up so blind
How did a history of ignorance
Inflict itself on my mind?

My eyes open now
Watch the layers fall off
My naked body raw
From the shedding so rough

This awakening was slow
But I trust in its timing
Moving forward learning fast
Mind and body aligning



[View Dru reciting The Awakening](#)

What is this new place?
This body? This home?
Far from the starting line
A world so alone

A leap of faith brought me
Here to check out this view
It blew me away
Now what should I do?

Can I just move on
As if it hadn't happened?
Is it even possible to forget
My dance with dark magic?



EVERYTHING IS SEX

EXCEPT SEX WHICH IS POWER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Drusilla (Dru) Cowan is a queer artist and social entrepreneur, using her years raised in South Louisiana as inspiration for sexual health advocacy work. In late 2016, she co-founded [Survivor Alliance](#), an organization that brought together creativity, community, and healing for sexual abuse survivors and allies through events and workshops.

Dru currently works with other community organizations in Oakland and channels her advocacy work through art. She is the creator behind [You Are Hot Stuff](#), and has contributed to other collections like [The Kintsugi Project](#) and [Daddy Don't Go](#).

DRU COWAN
A PERSONAL HISTORY OF POWER
MEDIUM: ARTIST BOOK, MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE

SHANNON JONES...

Touching The Flame Of Intimacy



Shannon's passion for the healing and expressive arts began in childhood when she spontaneously brought a newborn kitten back to life through healing touch.

A visceral awareness passes through the audience. Shannon Jones creates an atmosphere of emotionality, self-awareness and healing for herself and for the audience as she performs *Touching the Flame of Intimacy*.

Therapeutic performance art is intended to ignite 3 levels of awareness: physical, mental and emotional and to draw responses from the dancer and her witnesses. This style of performance offers healing for the artist and creates an atmosphere of self-awareness for the observers.

Choreographed movement resources are filtered in among improvisational repertoire and most of the movement arises from embodied, present moment expression using the 3 levels of awareness.

"The aesthetic quality of the piece varies each time I perform due to the authenticity of what is present for me in the moment. I utilize space, time, speed and various movement behaviors as resources for development and transformation".

The larger than life art piece displayed behind her was created during Shannon's 12 month Tamalpa Life/Art Process training in Oakland, CA.

Each artist was asked to create a self portrait based on the arrival of metaphors, images, emotions and physical sensations, achieved through guided, authentic movement.

ABOUT SHANNON

Shannon's passion for the healing and expressive arts began in childhood when she spontaneously brought a newborn kitten back to life through healing touch. Her love for nature, connection and dance were driving forces that fostered balance and self-confidence during a rocky childhood. Shannon continues her therapeutic education through spirituality, professional studies, personal exploration, healing and expressive arts, nature, connection and family life.



Her passion for multi-generational connection through healing and expressive arts led her to the Tamalpa Institute, where she holds a level I certification for expressive arts therapy.

Founder of Sacred Heart Healing Art, Shannon offers private and group movement classes and retreats, massage, creative arts, sharing circles and holistic lifestyle coaching for depression and anxiety.



She is an active performer and member of Co-Motion Dance Company in Carbondale, Colorado and also offers therapeutic dance performances for various events.

Shannon recognizes the practices of movement, creative arts and voice as potent tools in healing trauma and promoting release, change and growth.

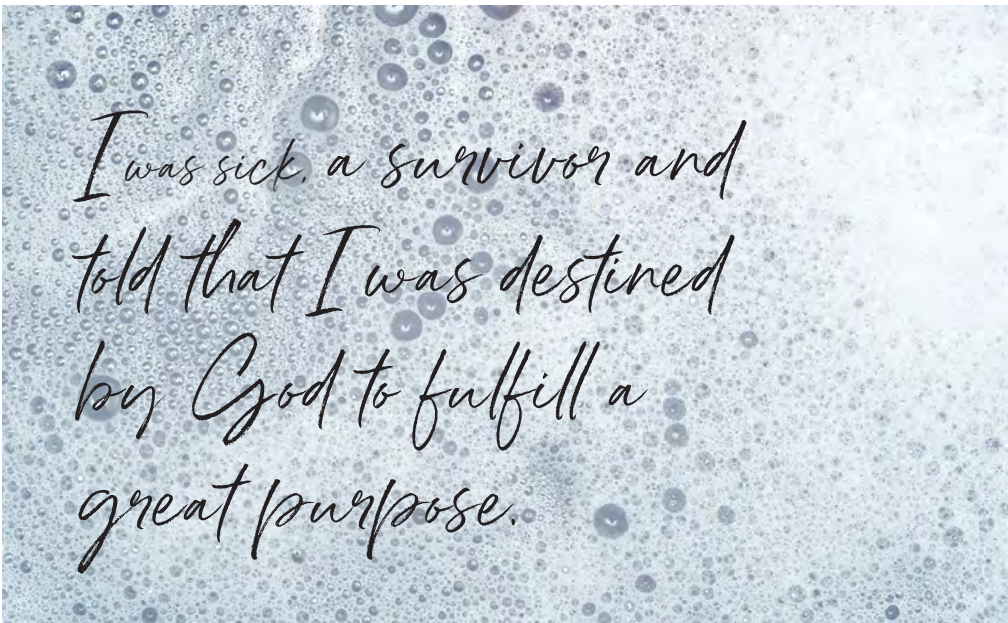
Her intention is to hold a safe and loving container for her community to experience self-connection and newfound awareness. She believes that the rainbow of emotions must be experienced so that authentic creativity can flourish and sustainable healing and change will be accomplished.



[Experience the Performance](#)

Hear Shannon's [Sacred Heart Warrior](#)

ANNE LAUREN... Baby in the Bathwater



I was sick, a survivor and told that I was destined by God to fulfill a great purpose.

Prefer Video?

Listen to [Anne's story on video.](#)

I was born on 7/11 and given the initials AMPM. I often joke that my purpose was to run a Kwik-E-Mart. My mother's gynecologist caught me and at first glance expressed a state of awe by saying, "She is the most beautiful baby girl that I have ever seen." His name was Abraham.

I can't imagine that what he actually saw in me was all that pleasant, at least not on the outside. Covered in blood and screaming at the top of my lungs, I entered the world as most babies do: miserable. It was so warm and safe inside my mother's womb, why would I want to be anywhere else? My thighs were thin and my labia fused – just as my parents had been praying for: that I would be beautiful so that I would be of value, but be protected from them actually ever entering me – beautiful and virginal: the perfect Catholic woman.

It's interesting that the man who awaited my arrival and touched me first at birth was named Abraham – the same name of the Father of a few religious traditions, including the one that I was baptized into before my first

year of life. I was beautiful, I was female, I was a daughter and I was Catholic. My identity was clearly defined from the beginning.

At 6 months old, I was diagnosed with an inability to let go: of stool mostly, but the diagnosis has applied to emotions later in life as well. Only half of my large colon worked. The other half needed to be cut out lest it burst and poison my little body, so I had to pull through surgery at 6 months old.

Much to my father's dismay, they also separated my labia during this surgery. I have scars across my torso, ankles and inner arms. Feeding tubes inserted into veins and scissors and stitches into my bowel kept me alive those early and delicate years. After the surgery, my system was sensitive, but healed. My belly would be forever bloated from the trauma of those years and my diet always restricted to help it relax.

Then the seizures started, grand mal – meaning the really big, long ones. I lost control of my body numerous times for hours on end. I shook and shook and

shook, my eyes rolled into the back of my head, I foamed at the mouth, until my brain figured out how to calm down and reawaken. Sometimes it didn't figure it out. Sometimes I would lose my pulse, be mistaken for dead and then surprise the physicians when their repeated shocks brought me back to life. I was treated with shots of valium to help my brain slow down faster, a controversial method at the time, but eventually it worked.

When I was old enough to use words, I would communicate that I was about to have a seizure, my mother would do her best to insert a needle into my bottom, the medicine would quickly rush to my head and luckily after time, the seizure would stop. But before I could speak, I would have seizures while strapped into car seats, before bedtime, during meals, or at any time of day really. I was sick, a survivor and told that I was destined by God to fulfill a great purpose. My identity was developing. These are some of the stories that I have been told about the messy beginning of my life.

When I was 24 years old, other memories surfaced of the stories that I hadn't been told, that I was in fact threatened not to tell. Secrets of the sexual abuse that haunted my family for generations. I had repressed the many instances when I was abused in order to survive. But they all came rushing out as soon as I was ready to receive them. My father,

and diced and sewn back together by this point and the rape further fragmented me. My identity continued to be defined: I was a victim of violence.

I was clearly the baby in some very murky bath water. Through spirituality, forgetfulness, shame and repression, I did my best to keep myself from drowning. And I did, survive that is, until

“

*I couldn't remember
the illness or the incest.
But my bones
remembered, my
muscles remembered,
my mouth remembered
and it wanted to drain
itself of all that dirty
water.*



my grandfather and my uncle all raped me. People often want to know specifics – so I'll clarify (not that it matters – it's all terrible regardless of severity) – it was vaginal, it was anal, it was oral, it was penetrative and fondling and that was just the physical stuff. It doesn't even include the emotional, verbal and spiritual violence that kept me quiet, made me internalize the abuse as my fault and shamed me into a life that I had been convinced I was worthy of. God must've hated me, I was made to believe.

My first memory of rape was at 2 years old. My body had already been sliced

I couldn't keep myself afloat anymore.

As soon as I moved out of my parent's home at 18 to go to college, my body started shutting down. I couldn't remember the illness or the incest, but my bones remembered, my muscles remembered, my mouth remembered and it wanted to drain itself of all that dirty water. I literally began shaking again. I couldn't go to the bathroom again. I had night terrors of being raped all the time again. Eventually, I couldn't move again. The unprocessed pain paralyzed me.

So I started to treat myself in all the ways that I knew how – all the ways that I'd been taught by my family system and the society I was raised in. First, I tried to meet violence with violence. I picked and scratched at my skin to relieve the emotional tension. It helped, but hurt. My skin is often red and scarred because of this bad habit. To this day, I still haven't found control over it. I'm trying, but it still helps. And it still hurts.

Then I tried to live up to the image of perfection projected onto me by my parents at birth – beautiful and pure. I adopted a strict religious observance, committed to preserving my virginity until marriage and “killed people with kindness” just as I was taught to do. I focused an immense amount of energy on my appearance: sculpting my hair, layering my face with makeup, shopping every weekend to ensure that I had the latest fashion trends. I worked diligently to be a stellar student and an achieved athlete, a loyal friend and an even better girlfriend.

As soon as I left for college, my focus shifted from meeting my parent's expectations to meeting God's expectations. What was my calling? Would I, in fact, manage a Kwik-E-Mart? Or maybe I was called to something more? I had survived so much after all. In college, I met a God who had different expectations than that of my parents.

This version of God wanted me to fight for justice. So, I did. I quickly learned of the suffering that plagues most of the world – social, economic, physical and sexual violence were the reality of many and I felt that it was my job to stop it. I studied economics, history, politics and spiritualities that sought to end their plight and make the world a more harmonious place. I volunteered in homeless shelters, immigration houses, food pantries, hospitals and prisons. Unknowingly, I was being



driven by my subconscious – maybe if I could help them, then I could make up for all of the years that I couldn't help myself. Eventually though, the plight of others and my inability to do anything about it depressed me into a psychological paralysis that I couldn't escape from. Pain was everywhere; how am I supposed to live with that?

When responsibility didn't work, I tried isolation and personal care. I studied theology for 6 years just to learn that God, if he existed, didn't hate me after all and maybe wasn't a he to begin with. I studied Feminist Spirituality to better understand a God who wanted me to have agency over my life. Once I felt this freedom, I abandoned all efforts to be the perfect Catholic woman and left the church. I began to see a therapist, experimented with psychological medications and spent most of my graduate school years sleeping. I was exhausted all the time, so I rested when I needed to rest, sought counsel when I needed help, began to learn basic boundaries and separated myself from things that caused me stress – primarily my family. This helped in many ways, but I was deeply lonely and wanted to figure out how to participate – where I belonged and with whom.

By this time, I was convinced that there was something wrong with me and my

mission became to fix and to find myself and a life that would take the pain away. I explored various healing modalities: talk and physical therapies, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medications, Chinese and Ayurvedic herbs, Acupuncture, Reiki, the list goes on. All of them helped, but none of them made me feel better about myself.

While the fixing and the finding myself occurred in my private life, my public life was full of efforts to assimilate. I did my best to fit into whatever culture I was surrounded by. I dressed up and showed up; I built the lovely apartment and the full closet. I thought that professional prestige and materialism would define me and make me feel better about myself. Not until I had it all – the Longchamp bag, the Marina San Francisco apartment, the Tiffany's jewelry and the leadership title – did I realize that this wouldn't work either.

Eventually, I gave up. I left my leadership role, I surrendered my lovely apartment, I sold all my nice stuff, tossed the make-up and I stopped trying so hard to fix and to find myself and some ideal life just out of reach. I let go of the concepts of beauty, femininity, family, spirituality and purpose forced upon me from birth.



*She needed me to
nourish her, to let her
feel all the feels that
she didn't get to feel,
to put words to all the
experiences that she
didn't yet have words
for, to acknowledge the
poking and prodding
of surgery, the
shaking of the seizing
and the recovery from
the rape.*

I stopped identifying as a victim and as a survivor. I opened the drain and let all that murky water whirl down and down and down until the tub was empty. I didn't know what would be left over after the depletion and I was depressed and terrified. Who am I if I'm not all of those things? Is there a baby in the bathwater? Is there anything worth saving from a life of illness and incest and the desperate effort to recover from both? Is recovery even possible? If not, is life even worth living at all for me?

acknowledge the poking and prodding of surgery, the shaking of the seizing and the recovery from the rape. She saw her future as dark and as tiresome and as lonely as she learned daily to hide and to protect herself with a shell of whatever her violent caretakers needed of her that day. She needed me to see our life through her eyes.

She showed me how she developed within that confined space, like all children do. She grew in that home that asked too much of her, with that



As the water subsided, I did begin to see her: myself apart from others' projected values and the paralyzing pain of my past, as well as that baby – born on 7/11, initialed AMPM, still potentially destined to run a convenience store and wailing from the interruption of her peace. I wanted so desperately to get out of that tub: the bounds of abuse and recovery that had held me captive for over 30 years, but she needed me to sit with her for a just little while longer there. She needed me to nourish her, to let her feel all the feels that she didn't get to feel, to put words to all the experiences that she didn't yet have words for, to

man who required rape in exchange for food and shelter and that woman whose codependency on that man kept her blind from his abusive nature. She matured in that church that required obedience to this father and mother in exchange for eternal salvation, that society that restricted femininity to mere appearances and that body that couldn't seem to find balance no matter how hard it tried.

She internalized the necessary subjugation, the need to have things and wear things and hold things in order to be approved of. She learned

to keep her words a certain way and her body a nice shape and her mind limited by the thoughts that others would approve of. Her identity was fragmented by the needs and desires of everyone who surrounded her, while her own identity hid under all that murky water. She came up to breathe when no one else was around by developing a vivid imagination. She built a world in her head safe from her present threats. Dissociation from herself became her survival.

brain right back into the confines of those porcelain walls and under that murky water whenever any present experience reminded her of the past. She was disappointed to find that the world outside her violent home still carried many of the patterns she experienced as a child: the codependency, the hyper-religiosity, the sexism, the lack of emotional intelligence, the economic hardship, the abandonment, the all too common sexual, verbal and physical violence.

college student taking on the world's problems, the grad student isolated but safe, the professional obsessed with achievement. In the process, finally, we found each other.

The woman I was always supposed to be, slowly surfacing from that murky water, breathing for the first time, getting herself out of that tub, stretching her tired and tight limbs, ready to be warmed by the sun, met this other fragment of herself – this screaming child trying not to drown, attempting to develop in a space much too constricted for her crying curiosity. We are doing our best now to honor each other.

I'm angry that I've been sitting in this same damn tub for so long: raging about how my family abandoned me when I told them about the abuse, that the justice system would never allow my abusers to be criminalized because of statutes of limitation, that my body and brain may forever suffer from the consequences of someone else's lack of control, that society doesn't understand or receive mental illness well and that my ability to succeed in a capitalist economy will always cost me more than it gives back. And she is still wailing and mourning the loss of a future that could've been so different if she never had to suffer from incest and illness.

But in the present moment we are together, learning to accept ourselves, learning to accept our worlds and our wounds and whatever future is available to us. We are teaching each other to let go of the expectations of family, the pressure of beauty, the restricted definitions of femininity, the need to fit into society and the pain of responsibility. We need to simply be ourselves for a little while: simple, curious, creative, confused and waiting. We are learning to be gentle with each other's pain, while still awaiting the day



When the incest was over and appropriate boundaries with family were set, the recovery immediately took its place. Recovery was in control now. The external violence ended when she left her family, but the internalized violence still drowned her. She thought that when she left the tub, she would be gone forever, but she quickly learned that PTSD would throw her

Recovery wasn't a choice for her, it was the only option if life were to remain a possibility. She had tried everything she knew and a lot of what she didn't in order to purify herself from all that had been done to her. Through the process, she got to know each fragment of her identity: the sick child who needed nurturing, the aggravated teen trying to meet everyone's expectations, the

“

The woman I was
always supposed to
be, slowly surfacing
from that murky
water, breathing for
the first time, getting
herself out of that tub,
stretching her tired
and tight limbs, ready
to be warmed by the
sun, met this other
fragment of herself...



when peace will come, for us and for everyone else. Still awaiting the day when #MeToo will be #NoMore. Still awaiting the day when all the fragments of ourselves and our world will find their wholeness.

And in this process, together we are realizing that wholeness isn't about fixing or finding, but simply about aligning. Aligning with our most harmonious selves while inviting the rest of the world to do the same – to find peace with each fragment of our minds, of our bodies and of our experiences until the pain is cleared, the purpose freed and the person fulfilled. Hopefully in alignment we will find a safe place in the world to belong. Hopefully in alignment, the world will find peace. If not, we will continue to work to make it so.

I am 32 years old now and finally feel free to leave that damn tub. Step by step, day by day, I am trying to figure out how to live outside of it, without leaving behind the baby who I found there: all the wisdom and the tools that I gained while living and working and growing and healing in that murky water and in those constrained, porcelain walls. My life can be what I want it to be now for the most part. I don't yet know what

that looks like, but I am breathing it in everyday. I know it has something to do with a lot of what got me out of that tub in the first place: intimate friendships, self-care, living near and swimming in endless bodies of water, being with mountains and movements that bring more harmony into the world. It has something to do with easy work that helps meet my financial needs like retail or maybe running a 7/11 or AMPM.

I understand now that I didn't survive to accomplish a grand purpose – God's, or society's or my family's. I survived because that is what we do at the core of our nature. We, like all other living things, survive. There is nothing glorifying about it (or fulfilling or sustaining) but the opportunity for life is somehow still available to me. And with opportunity comes possibility. Now, as I attempt the privilege of thriving, I recognize my need for nothing more than a sabbatical- a few years to rest from the incest and the illness, the recovery, the C-PTSD and the physical pain of my life experiences. And surprisingly, as I rest, my brain is figuring out how to slow itself down and my body is aching less and less and my energy is increasing and my stomach is digesting and I am finding success in simply being myself.

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Maybe recovery is available after all.
 Maybe the body is made to heal. Maybe my world and I are meant to be aligned.



Maybe recovery is available after all. Maybe the body is made to heal. Maybe my world and I are meant to be aligned. Maybe what Abraham saw when he caught me at birth was the beauty of who I have always been without the constraints of the bath or that murky water. Maybe my identity can be fluid and form around her. Maybe my pain can empower. Maybe the spirit of the other Abraham, the Father of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, is now catching me as I am reborn into a new and safer way of being. Maybe life can be as warm and as harmonious as it was before the misery. Maybe I am worthy of more. Maybe, just maybe, I will experience the possibility of being whole. And maybe I'll work at a Kwik-E-Mart. We'll see.



PHOTO: BERTA AMELINAITE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Lauren is a writer, creator and advocate. She shares her story of healing from childhood incest and illness to end sexual violence, influence policy to help those hurting and encourage survivors to seek recovery resources. She also dabbles in intuitive painting, tinkers on the piano, unashamedly sings at the top of her lungs in the shower and pretends that she's funny.

You can [find Anne here](#).

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I was guided to use some visuals, some words and the opening and closing of my chakras as I emerged from one era of my life to another. I wanted to believe that my heart stayed open throughout most of my life, but to my surprise, that wasn't the case. But our hearts are resilient and facilitate most of our healing.

Those who harmed me no longer have the power to harm me from this moment on. It is my life, not theirs.

Learn more about [Stephanie in her Post Exhibit Interview](#)

Some things I realized – my parents did the best they knew how. Most of the people in my life did the best they knew how. I did the best I knew how.

The middle ages of my life were confusing in so many ways. It was a time of exploration into so many aspects of my life. I discovered I could live as a victim or claim all of my life back.

I wanted to believe that my heart stayed open throughout most of my life, but to my surprise, that wasn't the case.



CARI KNAUDT LAUSIER
HOPE II
MEDIUM: MIXED MEDIA.

CARI KNAUDT LAUSIER... Hope II



Hope II, is dedicated to my journey through some very tough “life” stuff. Including, but not limited to, the sexual assault on myself by a coach, a friend and a boss.

While sitting at my desk, on a very boring hold, I was looking out the window and noticed a pattern from branches shadowing on my window screen. It looked like a network or the interconnectedness of life. In that boring moment I felt a surge of creative intrigue and began capturing images as the light continued to play with the branches.

I created this work as part of a photography project where I was exploring techniques in creating memorable photographic art. What speaks to me about this piece is the way it reflects the messiness of life with the “hope” shining through.

When I was asked to submit work for Claire O’Leary’s “The Empowered Voice Traveling Exhibit and Symposium”, this piece came to mind immediately. It expresses how I continue to process the feelings related to my sexual assaults as they surface. I can never fully escape the pain that other people’s infringement on my boundaries have caused, but I can look towards the light and find my way through the messiness. Seeking moments of glistening hope and joy, while trying to let the past go.

TANYA BLACKLIGHT...

Music of the Ovarian Spheres



Art is a part of me
that I am always
reconnecting with
and re-birthing
through nature, fabrics,
paint, movement, film,
and mixed media of
many forms.



The feminine form is often my subject matter. Be it in dance, film, paint, jewelry, or healing arts, I often find myself returning to the study of the subject in a very personal way. I relate my art to my own healing and growth in relationship to my sexuality, my dance, my relationships, and my purpose in the world. Art is a part of me that I am always reconnecting with and re-birthing through nature, fabrics, paint, movement, film and mixed media of many forms.

Tanya's creativity was transformed by living in Colorado, where she has become herself via time in nature, dance, motherhood and community. Influenced by natural cycles, metaphysics, collective biorhythms and psyche, her work is translated into modern day storytelling via the human form in dance, paint, fabric and multimedia.

Tanya is Creative Director of Blacklight Studios in Paonia, Colorado a Multicultural Arts and Healing Center reclaiming indigenous ways through earth wisdom. She holds circles for sacred sexuality, community education, social justice restoration, as well as art, movement and healing modalities for all ages, both in person and online.

[Connect with Tanya](#)



TANYA BLACKLIGHT
MUSIC OF THE OVARIAN SPHERES
MEDIUM: ACRYLIC, SHELLS, SEQUINS, GLITTER, METAL, WOOD, THREAD

CLAIRE O'LEARY... Silent No More



Founder of The Empowered Voice, Claire shares insights into her healing journey as a child sexual abuse survivor. She acknowledges that she has flourished not only in spite of, but also because of the incest.

It is my intention to create a healing tool for myself and for others through my artwork. I discovered many different aspects of my little girl during this process. She and I have had many conversations (at various ages) around being seen and heard – one of the most difficult things for me and most other survivors as well.

I noticed that through artwork and journaling on a deeper level, I can

discover so much more about myself and what I can do to reclaim my lost soul to become whole again. It seems each time I use artwork as a medium, it takes me deeper into my heart and soul. I would not be who I am today without my art and writing. In fact I would not be who I am today without the incest to guide me.

It has made me stronger, more compassionate and allows me to be vulnerable and open. Without it, I would not be doing the work I am today. For that, I am grateful!

The silence is killing us. It is time to be seen... Time to be heard.

[Learn more about Claire](#) and how she advocates for survivors.



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I noticed that through artwork and journaling on a deeper level, I discover so much more about myself and what I can do to reclaim my lost soul to become whole again.

Silent No More



CLAIRE O'LEARY

SILENT NO MORE

MEDIUM: ARTIST BOOK, MIXED MEDIA, COLLAGE

KATE BOSWORTH...

The Story That Wants to be Told



Listen to [The Story That Wants to be Told](#)

*It's a story of black
darkness closing in
around me, definitely
not the right type
of story to inflict
upon these poor
unsuspecting people
of the workshop.*

A couple of months ago I was leaving class and I saw a flier on the bulletin board in the hallway and it said "Storytelling workshop." I was like yes, storytelling workshop, I'm there.

So a few weeks later I was at the first session of the workshop and we listened to some recorded stories and we learned how to tell a good story. Then we were invited to tell a story of our own.

Now, it's like something had drawn me to this workshop, like there was something in me that wanted to be told. But now here in the workshop, I couldn't think of anything. My mind was blank. So we got prompts to help us think of a story, things like when were you most afraid or embarrassed or surprised and is there a regret that you have or what's the biggest decision you've made. Still I couldn't think of anything, so I spent the next week mulling it over.

I was thinking maybe I could tell a story about this past summer when I went backpacking with a group of friends and we actually ended up getting trapped in the mountains because this mudslide blocked the only road out. I could tell that one or I could tell a story about how I fell in love with the person I've spent a third of my life with. That's a good one. I could tell a story about that time in southern Mexico in this really remote area on a dirt road on an edge of a cliff with a bus driver who was shit-faced drunk.

I almost didn't go to the second session of the workshop. I just felt like these stories I was thinking of didn't quite seem to fit for some reason.

So I went and met with the instructor and I reviewed how to tell a good story. I tried to think about how I could make the mud slide incident work. I did go to the second session of the workshop and I heard other people tell their stories. And I was like man, they have great material. What's my story?

And then that night riding my bike home, there was this tiny little sliver of moon in the sky and I was riding my bike home through the dark streets and I realized the story I want to tell (the story that wants to be told) and I realized why I had been so challenged 'cause see the thing is the story I want to tell (the story that wants to be told) is not the kind of story that is told in polite company. It's a story that people don't want to hear, I told myself.

It's a story that's dark. It's painful. It hurts. Stories like that are best kept untold, right? They're best left in the dark. The other thing is the story I want to tell (the story that wants to be told) it's a story that's already been told. It's being told again and again, a chorus of voices, the same refrain. Why tell a story that's already been told? I thought. But I realized riding my bike home on that dark night in early fall under that tiny sliver of a moon, I realized the story I want to tell, the story that wants to be told is a story of being raped. No it's not an appropriate story to share. It's a story of black darkness closing in around me, definitely not the right type of story to inflict upon these poor unsuspecting people of the workshop. It's a story of seeing my paralyzed body in front of me being caged in, but I'm exaggerating, right? I felt paralyzed, but I wasn't really paralyzed, right?

It's a story of waking up hung-over and full of shame, see? I was drunk. It was my fault. It's a story of being bruised and bleeding and blaming myself, but that makes it sound worse than it was. I mean the blood was only because it was the first time I'd had sex. It's a story that wasn't violent. I said no, no, but my body was passive, lifeless, force was not required. It's a story where the violence came later, hating myself and hurting myself, cutting and scratching and burning myself. Starving myself, wanting to kill myself and my secret, a story of addiction and confusion and depression, definitely not the kind of story to share.

But this is my story (the story that wants to be told). And it's also a story of somehow surviving and it's a story of anger – burning, searing anger – a story of grief and loss and mourning. It's a story of asking for help, a story of evolution and transformation and healing. It's a story of learning to love myself after all these years.

And, I realized riding my bike home on that clear, crisp night in early fall under that tiny sliver of a moon that I do have lots of stories to tell and maybe someday I'll share my stories about the mudslide and about falling love and about how scared I was on that bus in southern Mexico, but right now those stories don't fit me, right now, this is the story that fits, this is the story that wants to be told and this is a story that I hope somehow by telling will stop happening over and over again inside my head.

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*And it's also a story
of somehow surviving
and it's a story of
anger, burning,
searing anger and
a story of grief and
loss and mourning.
It's a story of asking
for help, a story
of evolution and
transformation and
healing.*

JULIE HART... Incest Ends With Me

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We talk about mental illness now, we talk about alcoholism, we talk about domestic violence, we talk about PTSD. What we don't talk about is incest.



My boy was four and I was 44 and my incest story was rising again. I had heard years ago that sometimes our trauma memories are triggered when our children become the age we were at the time of our trauma. I had been healing from the trauma of incest since I was 22, and although not ashamed, that doesn't mean I was healed...

THE LAST TABOO TOPIC

I am well aware this is not a topic for polite discussion; in fact, it is my belief that incest is the last taboo topic. In the interest of "name it to tame it," one snowy January day I walked the river path by my house and made a video with the intention of putting it on Facebook. For the umpteenth time publicly I spoke my beliefs: "We talk about mental illness now, we talk about alcoholism, we talk about domestic violence, we talk about PTSD. What we don't talk about is incest."

At the end of my six and a half minute monologue, I crooked my right arm

out to my side and I crooked my left arm out to my other side and said, "Join me. I want arms linked..." and one by one people stepped up – one person more than a handful reached out with love and words of encouragement and support. The next day, I got out my acrylic paints and found a sheet of finger painting paper and I drew the seven of us in a rainbow of colors to show that we stand for the children, we will protect them, we are the first line of defense. I tagged those six friends... and lost two of them. Two fellow moms, women in my small mountain town whom I had gotten to know when we were all pregnant untagged themselves; they didn't want this artwork, this show of solidarity against incest, plastered all over their Facebook wall. I understood then and I understand now; I really do. This sexual abuse stuff is edgy, nasty, disgusting, shameful. This is why it remains the final frontier of what we will talk about – incest, the last taboo topic.

INCEST IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

It wasn't until last year that I realized this art I made so many years ago represents something a little closer to home. You see, I am the youngest of seven and as I've come to name it (to tame it), incest is a family affair. I have been putting the pieces of my family's incest story together for almost three decades. Fearing that this secret would kill my mom, I kept my own incest a secret until I was 22 and in dribs and drabs I've found out I wasn't the only one (and I finally learned who my perpetrator was). Just as there is a deep, collective shame in society (hence: last taboo topic), there is a deep, collective shame in my family. I get it; I really do.

INCEST ENDED WITH US

But what I also get is this: incest ended with us, each and every one of us. My siblings and I grew up in an incest family but each one of us decided this is one family legacy we would not be passing down to our children. Because we made the decision we did, my 29 nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews, ranging from 42 years old to 6 months, are not survivors.

Even though we grew up in an incest family, my six siblings and I – we are the rainbow, protectors of our children. And for that I am very, very proud.



IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS...

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER
AND NEEDS MEDICAL ATTENTION, CALL 911.

NATIONAL

RAINN Hotline:
800.656.HOPE (4673)
Live Chat 24/7
Crisis Text Line:
Text "START" to 741741

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
www.thehotline.org
Select "chat now"
Or call **1-800-799-7233**
(If you're not alone text
LOVEIS to 22522)

COLORADO

CCASA Hotline:
800.799.SAFE (7233)

Advocate Safehouse Hotline:
970.285.0209

Response Hotline:
970.925.7233

Colorado Crisis Support:
844.493.TALK (8255)
Text TALK to 38255
4 pm – 12 am, 7 days a week

What's Your Story?

*Your Voice Wants to be Heard
...Needs to be Heard*

*It's important for you to share your story
...for you
...for them*

The Empowered Voice is a strong force for the empowerment of women who have been silent for years and are reclaiming who they are at the core.

We are a force to be reckoned with!

We are Seen and We are Heard!

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