

# Our Voices

The Creative Writing of Survivors  
of Domestic Abuse

**Women's Aid**  
 **FEDERATION  
NORTHERN IRELAND**



# Our Voices: Introducing the 'Hear Her Voice' Creative Writing Workshops

In the midst of a world pandemic, when collective expression, support and understanding were most needed, the Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland provided their members with the opportunity to try some creative writing as part of the 'Hear Her Voice' project. Funded by Comic Relief, the 'Hear Her Voice' project captured women's lived experience of domestic abuse through focus groups, interviews and creative activities.

Between July and August 2021, I facilitated 21 creative workshops via Zoom with seven Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland.

## The results are quite simply outstanding.

These remarkably talented women succeeded in creatively expressing their own voices. For some this came more naturally than others, but all took up the challenge and attended every class with enthusiasm. Most had no experience of creative writing, yet all responded intuitively and freely to the prompts and exercises set. There was understanding, mutual respect, encouragement and a genuine willingness to have a go with something totally new to them. Each woman was honest, brave and unique in her writing expression. The collective support and understanding was so apparent and I felt privileged to guide them through the writing process. Women's Aid support staff were always available when needed. More than once, someone remarked at the end of a session that she felt 'lighter'. I took this to be very positive. Zoom rules were important and established together:

- Take personal responsibility for what to share/not share
- This is a creative writing class not therapy
- Signpost to Women's Aid support workers
- Opt-in/out of writing exercises as you see fit
- Be honest, speak out, listen to others, be kind

Creative writing is an act of meditation in that you are fully present and your thoughts flow freely without thought of outcome. Description, atmosphere, rhythm and passion are then

expressed with near abandon. This is called 'getting into the flow'. Most sessions began with a short mind-ful meditation so each participant could relax and focus on herself and her breathing pattern. The whiteboard and share screen function in Zoom were excellent in facilitating group discussion, for example, around what 'Hear Her Voice' meant to each of the women. Brainstorming key words like Domestic Abuse, Narcissist, Family, Fear led to some rich and powerful words which were then used in their writing:

## "I was walking on eggshells for 35 years."

Music with lyrics displayed was a most effective tool for writing, especially 'Landslide' by Fleetwood Mac, 'This Is Me' from The Greatest Showman and 'Hear My Voice' by Celeste. The range of emotion expressed in these songs spoke to each woman in very different ways. Any fear or un-certainty about writing simply vanished as her own unique voice flowed onto the page. Most writing was free form - intuitive, instinctive and based on lived experience, often written in the third person. Raw, emotional human experience is evident in women's poems and haikus:

## Haiku

"I am a survivor,  
scarred but not wounded.  
Enlightened and wise."

Using personal words, stories and poetic expression, they literally threw open their front doors to reveal the vicious nature of mental and/or physical abuse and the chaos, cruelty, loss and pain which accompanies it. Some poems plead with the public to act not ignore the signs of domestic abuse; The PSNI must be contacted.

## "The vice kept on turning inside my head"

When doing character description, most women chose not to focus on the perpetrator; instead, they wrote some beautiful descriptions of their fathers. Their shared empathy, understanding, kindness and support in every class was so important. These women know that their voices are silenced no more. They now have the tools to write it loud!. Being part of their writing journey has been an honour for me. Read their words, feel their pain and be inspired by the courage and hope of these women. Hear Her Voice.

**Briege Mc Clean**  
Creative Writing Tutor  
13 September 2021



## Our Voices

System and society silenced us  
stigma and judged quietened us  
at last we have spoken  
louder now and not as broken  
we need to be heard  
have our stories shared  
getting our voices out  
that's important for now  
we are in this together  
until our journey allows us to see  
and my path has been tailored  
just for me  
so thank you Women's Aid  
you have rescued me

# Creative Writing Pieces

## I'm not that person anymore

I am not what happened to me  
I am what I choose to be  
I am not the person you walked into the ground  
And thought I would never get up

I am not the person who cried and cried  
Because I became a nobody to you and everyone around me

I am not the person who has a shattered heart  
Because of all the hurt you caused me

I now walk on the ground not under your foot  
The tears have stopped not altogether  
But there not because of you anymore and my heart is now on the mend  
Because of my daughter, family  
And the kindness of others.

## The Light

The light started to get in when  
I opened my door and walked out for the first time free

The light started to get in  
when I made my own decisions and realised,  
I am good enough

I am worthy of a place in this world  
It's the ones that hurt us that need to change  
and learn that I am an equal

My eyes now see that light, for a future  
Bright and free and a person who won't look back  
But keep on walking  
To that light and future

## My Scar

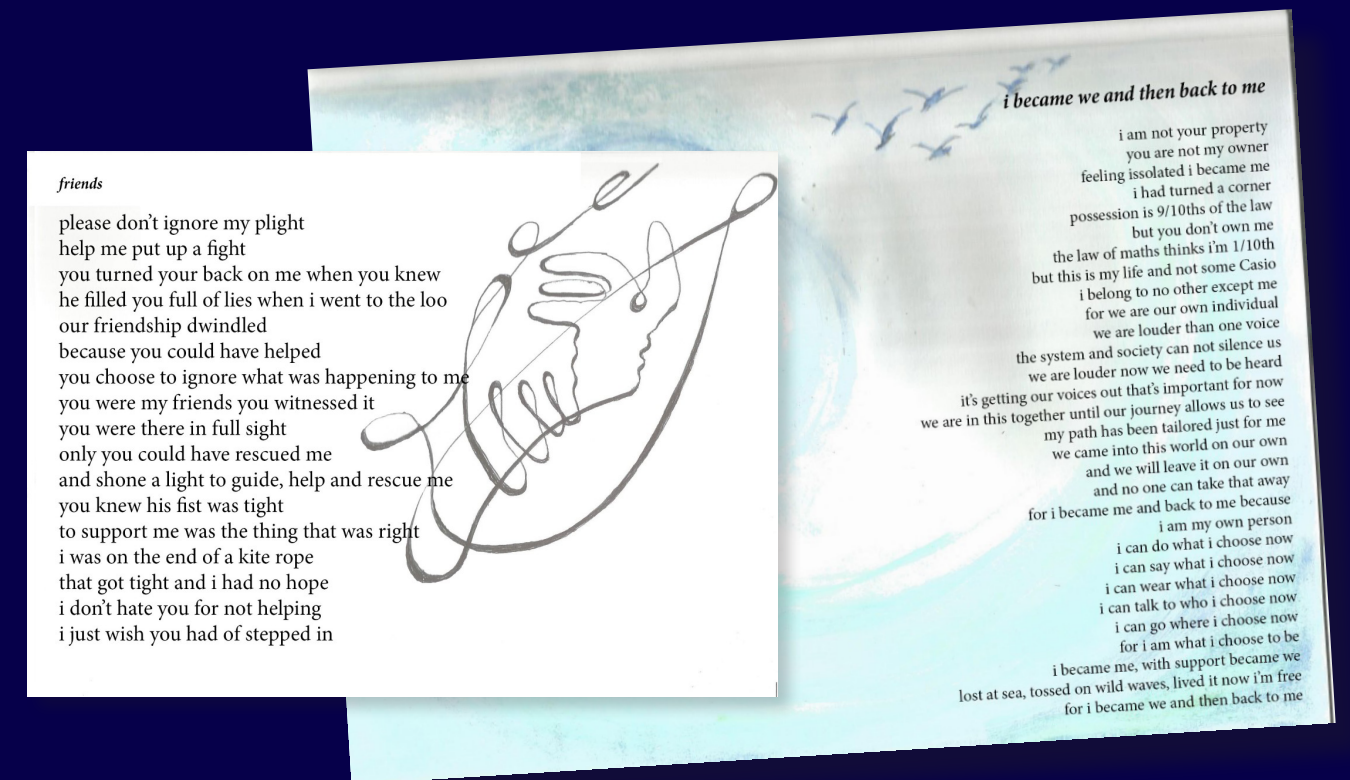
Never be ashamed of a scar  
It simply means you are stronger  
Than what tried to hurt you

Never be ashamed of what you have come through  
It's not your fault  
That scar will heal and so will you  
A stronger person able to stand alone  
If that's what you want

I wear my scar with pride  
A reminder of how far I have come  
And no matter how many scars I have  
I know he will never get that chance again  
I am stronger now  
I can see a future

## Don't be afraid

I don't have to walk looking at the ground anymore  
I can hold my head up high  
I can smile and not be afraid  
I can talk to my friends and not hear my heart beat out of my chest  
I can walk out my door and not set the timer on my phone  
But best of all I can teach my daughter  
We are stronger than we think  
We don't have to put up with abuse  
There is help out there  
Its hard to ask but you will be glad you did  
And when you do your life will start  
And that smile that was lost will shine again  
Because you don't have to be afraid anymore



## When 'I' Becomes 'We'

I was standing on my own looking at each person as they passed me by  
And thought  
Are they the same as me?  
Scared, lonely at rock bottom  
Or do they look at me  
And know I am a nobody  
Faceless, just one of many who is hurting  
And then I took a stand  
I didn't want to be a nobody  
I didn't want to be scared or lonely anymore  
I took that first step  
Anxious and wide eyed, but it got easier  
The friendly faces, the ears that listened the hugs that were welcomed  
I started to be me again  
I don't stand on my own anymore  
We stand together me and my support family  
United through pain but standing together  
I became We  
Trying to change what caused that pain  
Teaching and learning those who don't understand  
Alone my voice won't be heard but together we can raise the roof  
And change that for the next person  
Who walks through the door for their first step  
I am not on my own, we are in this together  
I am now part of a worldwide family  
That allows me to be me  
But an important part of We  
Still standing together



Little Shadows

Please don't ignore my plight  
Help me put up a fight  
Help me to get the help  
To stop the hurt  
My kids they hear the shouting  
They're scared and frightened wondering are they next  
They look like little shadows  
Eyes gaunt and haunting trying to hide where they can  
I want to fight  
I want them to know a life without fear  
I don't want their life to be like mine  
I want them to know the difference  
If you hurt me, I will walk  
I have choices I don't have to take your abuse  
I can be happy and see my children smile again

Its ok to be alone

It doesn't mean I'm lonely when I'm alone  
Just like it doesn't mean I'm not scared when I show the world my mask and my smile  
I hide it well  
I look just like you  
Make up done dressed to impress  
Because I don't want you to know my fear  
I don't long to be you I long to be the true me

Its ok to be alone and happy in my own company  
Not jumping at the smallest of sounds  
Not rushing back at breakneck speed because your dinner is not on the table  
Or the house is not as it should be  
I'm ok being on my own its not so bad  
I like the quiet  
It makes me feel safe  
Some say the silence is deafening  
But not me  
To me it's a smile on my face, a cup of tea that's not rushed  
A chat with my friends without fear  
Being on my own is like heaven to me  
A treasure to enjoy  
Being alone can be the best place in the world

Hope

Of hope and desire  
I see my future change  
With dreams I didn't have before  
Because I am now full of hope  
Hope of change  
Hope of love  
Hope of freedom from my mine  
And the nightmares it holds  
Hope for me

Happy

My future looks bright  
My hope and love restored  
I am happy now

Free

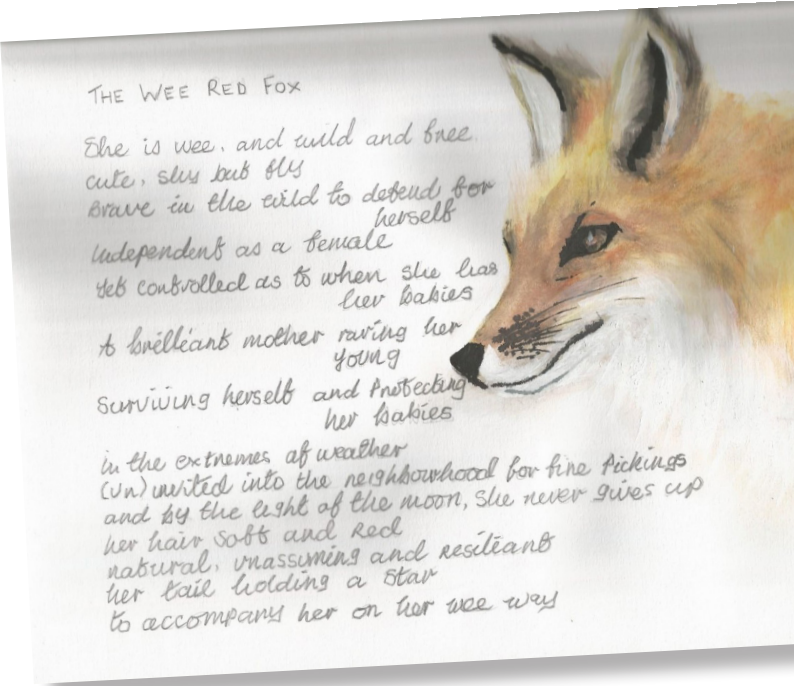
I am free to live  
The change this writing has brought  
Freedom from my mind

Hell

When cupid aimed his little bow  
The arrow it hit you  
I wish that arrow kept on going  
To someone who loved me true  
I had a lot of dreams  
But the nightmare it began  
You took those dreams away from me and turned into the devil  
But hell is a nice warm place for you  
I will look down from above  
Chilling on that fluffy cloud  
With lots and lots of love  
So, thank you Women's Aid  
For the care that you have shown  
I really do appreciate  
The help and all the love

Reflection

I saw my reflection and didn't like what I saw  
My smile had faded, I looked old and weary  
The hate I feel for myself is real  
and it's Because I built my life around you  
But bit by bit that has changed  
I can now look at that reflection, but it has taken time  
My life is like the seasons  
Spring and summer sunny and new  
a carefree youth happy and in love  
Autumn brings change  
when I met you, my life changed forever just like the leaves changing from green to brown  
My life went from happy to sad from being free and carefree to a prisoner in my own home  
Winter dark no light no future  
the worse years of my life, cold hard and miserable  
No sunshine in my life, sad and teary  
But now I have gone full circle and I'm back to spring and summer again  
Free, smiling and starting to like that reflection because I asked for help and got it  
My life is now bright, sunny, and changing for the better





① Creative Writing 14 & 15th July  
H - happy  
helpful  
hurry  
hear  
Honey

I am happy when we go on holiday  
I like to be helpful to people  
I am always in a hurry to get  
ready to go out  
Isn't it lovely to be able to hear  
A lot of people like honey but I  
don't.

Hear her voice

Empowerment to share experience  
get their lives and control back

Listening to what someone has  
been through

## There is nothing I'm not worthy of

There's nothing I'm not worthy of  
I have hopes that the fear will leave  
for good.

Yes, for good, today I took a small  
step but in another way a giant one  
for me.

I had the radio on at a volume and  
station to suit me, not you.

I want to live the life I want and not  
to be controlled by you.

My makeup, hair and clothes that I  
want to wear, not what you want me  
to wear

This is me

## I looked through that small window of hope

I looked through that small window  
of hope

Dashed once again

Only to hear his voice and his  
footsteps

Coming back into the bedroom

I just lay there still and motionless

The hope he would calm down  
and stop shouting as the girls lay  
sleeping.

I hadn't done anything wrong

But as usual I had in his eyes

So I must have.

IT WAS ALL MY FAULT

② See hope light at end of tunnel.

Silence - Domestic violence for too  
long.

Threat of violence happening  
shame and fear

Silence can be a burden

Good listening ear

Empowerment Sharing experience

sense of control back Good

listening ear (Women's Aid)

Silence Threat of violence

burden cruel hope

She had to share her experience

to a good listening ear which

was woman's aid to unload

that burden and bring back

some empowerment and hope

after the cruel experience she

suffered. Silence can be a

## What domestic violence means to me

I sit here and wonder what I ever did wrong, but it was you playing a game with my head all along.

You made empty promises that you couldn't keep and every night into my pillow I would weep.

You told me I was stupid and dumb but with every slap I felt numb.

Pretending to perfect when everyone was around but your violent voice stuck in my head like a loud sound.

I wondered if I would ever break the toxic chain whilst you told people I was insane.

I always felt like I was never good enough, but I was because I am tough.

If I could go back and change it all, I wouldn't have given you my number and answered your call.

With every tear I felt pure fear but I knew my time ending with you was near.

You didn't understand the real pain I was in but other people did and said it was a sin.

I was always to blame but it wasn't my fault you were the problem, and you didn't even feel shame.

I'll never fully understand how you treated me so badly but now I'm living my best life without you gladly.

It's been a long road but I'm back and standing proud and now I'm me again all year round.

## Being Brave

Then she walked on eggshells for thirty years

only realising now that this is not normal.

In the past it was all mental and controlling.

She comes away now after the first physical  
attack. She leaves.

Now she is empowered writing her story,  
sharing her experiences and taking control  
back.

Women's Aid Northern Ireland is a good  
listening ear.

If only she can share her story.

Maybe someone, just one person can see  
that domestic violence is not only physical but  
controlling and mental.

Now I can see a light at the end of this tunnel  
and although there are still many bad days  
ahead.

There is a rainbow of hope and happiness  
for me.

## The vice was turning

The vice was turning

The pressure was building

The build-up was electric

The explosion has happened

The shouting starts

The shouting keeps going

The shouting continues

The shouting stops

I can breathe

I can breathe

③ burden and to share her experience  
enabling her to rebuild her life  
and get some sense of control  
back plus helping to get over the  
shame and fear that was held  
inside of violence happening again  
She now feels stronger and able to  
get on with life feeling in a lot  
better place

He had no place here

He had no place here she now can  
recognise when she looks back at  
everything herself and children were  
put through at his cruel hands -  
We are all so different now a lot  
happier and relaxed. Her home is  
more welcoming to friends and family  
Full of Joy and laughter. No more  
stress or feeling uncomfortable.  
Life is for living and we enjoy  
every day.



Hear her voice

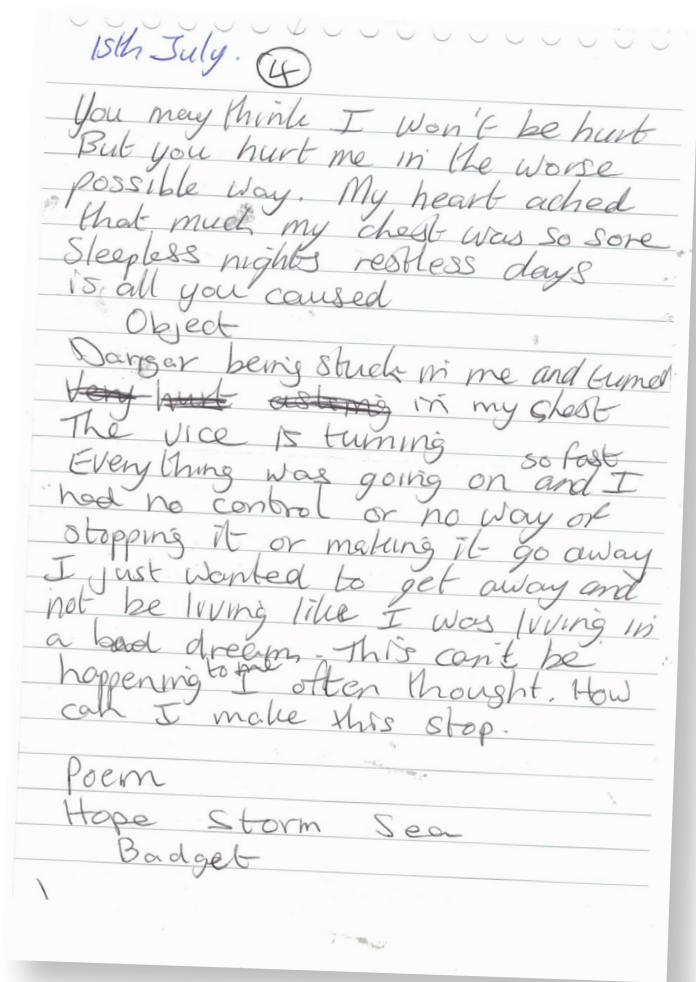
She is finally seeing the light at the end of the dark tunnel and feeling something she hasn't felt in a long time; if memory serves this particular feeling is hope. She is empowered now because she has a chance to break the deafening silence of the dreaded domestic abuse. She now has gained back a sense of control, something which she lost for a long time. She has been a victim of cruel domestic violence but now she feels strong, she now has a well-equipped army. She's listened to and helped by heroes known as Women's Aid. She is determined, she is strong, she is a domestic abuse survivor.

She lay awake and anxious, looked through that small window of hope. As usual she lay awake, alert and anxious, asking herself where did she go wrong this time, and what's going to be the punishment. She is wondering when these sleepless nights are going to come to an end. I looked through that small window of hope and convinced myself that this continual, vicious circle of violence is coming to an end. No more bruises, no more angry outbursts, no more punishment. I have gained hope, hope for a quiet life, a safe place and a listening ear. I am hopeful because I've got Women's Aid now therefore I'm protected, secured a listened to.

Hear my cry  
But I won't give up  
I will always try  
Because I don't need you, I just need me  
Not the me you controlled but my very own version

Pain As An Object

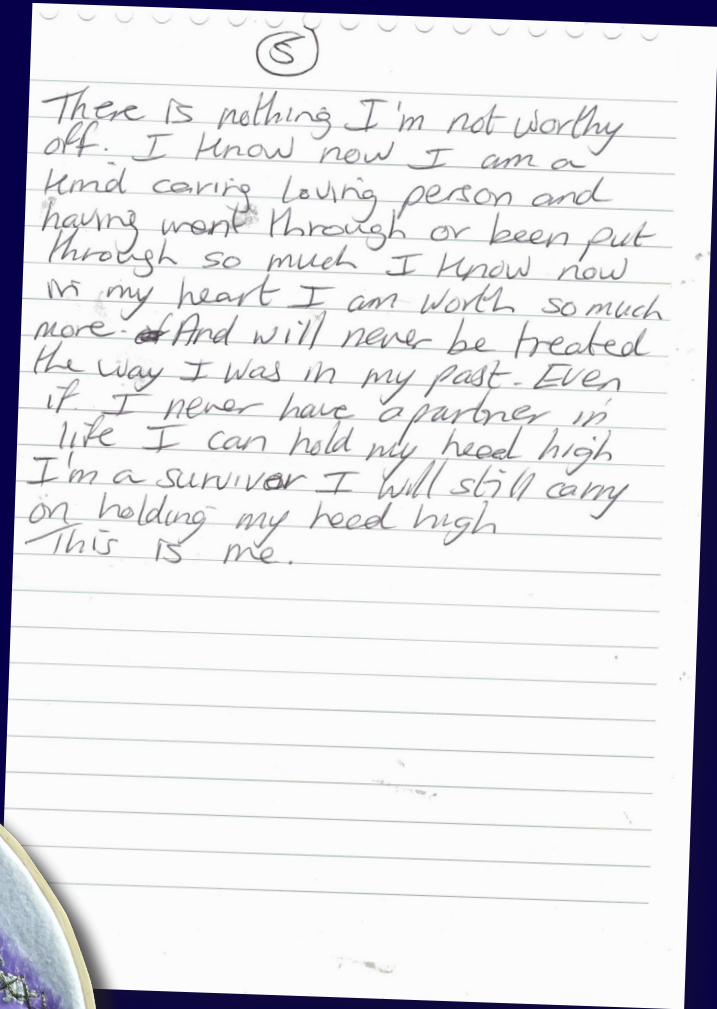
The vice is turning, the time was ticking at a slower pace than normal and the outburst is about to happen. The pain starting in my heart and finishing with a punch to the face. My whole body was sore but worse than that it feels like he has control of the knife. The knife he uses to stab me in the back, to make me dinner and ultimately the knife he uses to mentally drain me.



Hear her voice

- Empowerment, sharing, experience
- Opposite of voice = silence - domestic violence has been silent for too long
- Women getting a sense of control back as their voices are heard
- Your voice can give hope to other ladies - shows that there is light at the end of the tunnel
- A good listening ear (Women's Aid)
- Threat of violence
- Cruel

There's nothing I am not worthy of, because I am precious and good-hearted and kind. I am worthy of more than you'll ever be able to give. This is me, the smiley, happy-go-lucky girl I was before the trauma you put me through. Now, sit back and watch me take on the world. A world of peace, calmness and happiness. A world you are no longer nor will you ever be in again





## A Survivor's Story

This short story is dedicated to all the women who have survived their journey through domestic violence, and giving courage for others who may need a silent friend.

He seems like a great guy. He is great with the kids. He loves you so much. These are some of the words we hear when we seek counsel in others without facing the mental & unfortunate physical consequences.

I once thought it was love. That it was forever. That I had found someone who loved me for me. Then I got pregnant. And it was at this same time he changed too. I was so scared of the unknown but so excited that I was going to have the ideal 'perfect little family'. Whereas he knew he had me trapped.

And it's funny because that's exactly how it feels. This person, once idolised, was now distant, jealous, irate, manipulative, condescending & the list goes on. It starts with being distanced from friends. Then it's 'Who are you texting?' 'Where are you going? I'm coming with you. Why are you wearing that? Who are you trying to impress? I'm the one that cares about, no one else does. No one else would want you. But you know I love you, right?'

Then we got our 'family home'. A family home of which I was always alone in. A family home which I wasn't allowed to invite anyone over. A family home without a family, just me afraid to talk or leave. And then my soon-to-be father always out.

At this stage you know something's wrong, but do you do anything?

No. Because you love him and you can't do this without him. This long 9 months that seems to go on a lifetime becomes my way of life. And slowly he's conditioning me and I start thinking that this is okay and that when our baby was born things would get better.

How wrong I was. My gorgeous baby girl was born. The one thing that was mine. The one person I could confide

in that wouldn't tell a soul. The one precious person who could make everything better. But it just got worse.

I was so excited for our first night at home. Was he? He went on a night out and didn't come home. There was me, post-labour, 24 hours, 17 stitches, first time mother. Alone. But I still stayed. I still thought he would change.

Months go by, and things were getting worse. So then we rented a new bigger property with a big garden that I could picture my little girl with siblings running around. But he was just never home. Until I found out I was pregnant again. Then he was about more. For a week. Then it all went back to my new 'normal'. Then I was ten weeks pregnant. And that dreaded day came.

'I'm going to the shop', he said, 'Do you need anything?' At this point things like that made me smile. He was being nice. He cared. He was changing.

One hour passed.  
Two hours  
Three

I don't remember at what hour I stopped watching the clock. But I gave up. I went to bed and put my baby in beside me, so at whatever time he came in, he couldn't get in beside me.

I never heard the front door latch, or him opening the bedroom door. But I felt the force of the blanket being ripped off me. Then the hitting started. He must have gotten bored as I lay there with no reaction. As soon as I heard him go back down the stairs, I grabbed my little one, made a mental picture of where everything was, and what I needed. I was done. I was leaving

First things first, I put her in her pram. I grabbed frantically for her essentials. At this point he came through the back door and looked at what I was doing and I seen the realization in his eyes. Next thing I knew I was pushed back and back again, then a door was closed. It was black and I couldn't see. Then I could hear my baby crying. So I fought and kicked with every ounce of energy I had.

I got out. I went straight for her and got her in her pram. Then ran up the stairs to grab my toothbrush and her dummy.

That's when he came behind me. That's when I was pulled to the ground. That's when I could feel my jeans being ripped off. That's when my body, mind and soul were violated.

Did I fight? Of course I did. All I could hear was my baby's screams. Then all I could hear was my heart. This was no drum heartbeat, this was a racing train heartbeat. All I could feel was a single tear roll off my face. And then I went numb. It's like I left my own body.

As soon as he was done he left. So I scrambled to my feet, grabbed my baby and went seeking for help. Picture this: 3am, a young girl in busted trousers, pyjama top and out with her baby. Most would know something was wrong. But when I got to the police station and pressed that buzzer, I was told to ring 101. At that time I broke and luckily a female officer was on that let me in straight away. It all happened quickly. I of course had to give statement after statement, without so much as a counsellor being offered or support worker or even family member! I sat there for three hours all alone. 6am they brought me to my mother's, took my clothes in an evidence bag, then told me not to shower and that they would be back at 12pm.

12pm finally arrived.

I had two officers with me for an hour journey. Once again, no support.

When I finally got there after what seemed like forever, I had another hour wait. Then after already being violated I was again. I know it's their job but at this point I was broken. Why don't they have a rape clinic open 24/7 is beyond me. I wouldn't wish it on anyone else. When they had all they needed after hours which seemed like an eternity. I got to go home and a referral was made to Women's Aid. As for the police, they told me I could shower and that I would be contacted in a few days.

Thankfully my support worker from Women's Aid was great. She organised for a scan to be arranged for my unborn baby, of which no one else seemed to think of. When I received the call that he had been arrested but had been granted bail I couldn't believe it.

What more evidence did they need? Knowing him though and how predictable he was, I knew it was only a matter of time before he would break those conditions. And he did. And this time the odds were in my favour and he didn't get bail granted.

The trial process was long and mentally exhausting. The hardest part was walking into his family which made me feel very intimidated.





## Hope

When they tell me  
I am beautiful  
But make me feel-worthless  
When I stand up for myself  
provoking-more insults  
I learn to play dead  
to absorb the hurt  
I learn to be silent  
to swallow the noise  
and hope-  
someone-somewhere  
will hear my voice

Being too intent on a naive state  
of self-pity and self-destruction  
A fear of becoming something  
other than a victim  
and hope - can seem unreachable  
until darkness is exposed

Hope, the thing with feathers  
that perches in the soul,  
spreads her wings in every moment  
You. Choose. To. Tell. Your. Story.  
and sings a tune without the words  
and never stops - at all.

A journey to freedom  
is just the beginning  
A life resurrected  
takes time and takes healing  
and when pain turns a corner-  
it will-I promise  
A warrior is born-you will resurface  
so please-be kind  
that's all I ask  
such a small word  
such a big impact  
on a soul that's been broken  
patched up and totalled

a comparison being  
the sense of freedom  
and someone out there  
knows how you're feeling  
like poetry-in a poem  
the truth is beautiful  
the truth is hopeful

I rise high above the darkness  
Swim soft in the sea of sun  
Fly free and wild from cages  
not meant for a heart like mine

I will honour in learning to love  
the me I left behind  
And hope-in all her glory-  
a forever friend of mine.

## Dreams and desires

I feel destined to float  
in and out of a broken heart  
like a dandelion  
blown to the air  
on a wish of anywhere  
but here

Somewhere in dreams  
desires flying  
like butterflies  
dancing in the wind  
on a wing and a prayer

We have to trust  
what's given to us  
what's meant for us  
will stay  
and what isn't  
will slip through our hands  
like falling sand  
swirling like dandelions  
blown to the air  
on a wish of anywhere  
but here.

## This is me

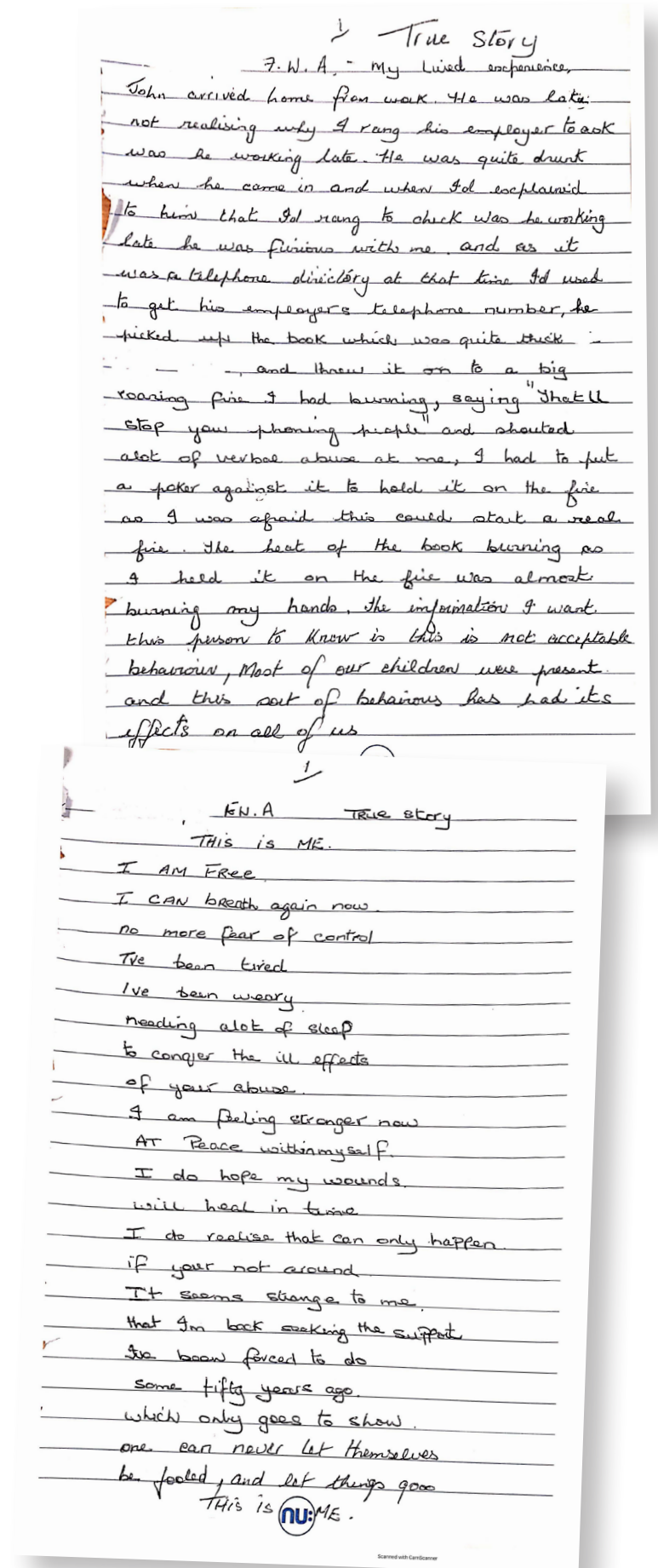
This is me  
forbidden to fly free  
confined to silence  
in a cage of dishonesty  
My soul is imprisoned  
I fade to grey  
My wild is denied  
I wilt away  
Dancing in shadows  
of a woman-I was

This is me  
dimming my light  
to avoid igniting  
collisions with thunder-  
sparking flashes  
of explosive crashes-  
from cloud to ground force

lightning bolts-  
shocking me  
in blinding sadness  
This is me  
no longer tolerating  
tornadoes of chaos

I am a deep indigo  
starlit sea  
ebbing wildly  
beneath a screen of steel  
I drown easily in memories  
of iron fist rulings  
stings of living  
in parallel lines  
a ghost like closeness  
a vague together  
a hushed forever  
Still- I swim  
to shores of freedom  
Still- I fly  
to skies of liberty

A journey of self-discovery  
in expression-  
breaking boundaries  
on dare to care missions  
of self-mercy healings-  
and cages open  
chains are broken  
I will arrive  
to where I am going  
my soul intact  
my heart still beating-  
I am free  
This is me





## Reflections

They were all lies  
she thought to herself.  
'Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still, I'll rise'.

A cool mid-summer breeze blows lazily around the room. A quiet, subtle type of flow and maybe, one would barely notice if they weren't already paying attention. If they weren't already hyper aware of every creak and squeak. A soft breeze can emit many a little movement; cards slowly falling over or the slight sway of a flower in a pot. Much like a field of barley, she guessed, or a swing of the hips. Something anyway, similar to that effect. She can feel it, making its way to her, swears she can almost see it, too. Moving toward her, in slow motion, like a snake, searching rapidly, as if it's job were to do her some kind of favour, like waking her from a statue still and fairly numb state.

But she is quite content in her comfortable chair, positioned perfectly in the corner of her once favourite place. She hears a bird salute a good morning, the first sign of daybreak is a clear one and from the half open window, she ponders if the bird has a friend to return the happy greeting. She wonders if birds sleep at all, and if so, she wants to know where.

The rapid speed of her mismatched thoughts, a consequence from lack of sleep, is interrupted by beams of sunlight, streaming through open spaces and gaps in the curtains, forming shadows and shapes, dancing a majestic rhythm 'n rhyme waltz of sorts, on the walls and ceiling. From her already deprived state, she isn't sure if she's dreaming- or escaping.

She watches the light show intently; In an almost meditative state, the illustration of a brand-new day is a play on her

now heightened senses, and she's pulling the soft pastel blue gown round her shoulders a little more, sinking further into the safety of the comfortable seat. And for an instant, allows the calm of the moment to soothe her soul and being.

Everything remains the same, she thought. Pictures on the walls of smiling faces, an antique vase, full of flowers and the dying embers of a fire she remembers lighting just yesterday, before her world exploded in rage and hostility.

And they're standing in front of her again. Tall shadow men with concerned faces, asking what seemed to be, a thousand difficult questions. But she couldn't answer. Not without revealing a shame, not without disclosing a fear of losing her family; she'd tell them. They respond, with a kindness she can't ignore, And she finds herself opening up, feeling a little brave yet terribly uncomfortable. She remembers thinking- 'I prayed for this now or never situation.'

"Start from the beginning. Let us get a picture of how we can help" says the concerned face, smiling eyes locking with hers. She clasps her hands around the fresh tea he offered, aware, as he writes, how the pen and paper sit in his hand, how he looks easily, with a slight tilt to his head, and so she tells him; voice quiet and head bowed: "The beginning was an awfully long time ago". "It's fine, he's softly saying, no judging, keep talking."

She wishes she could believe him when tall, shadow stranger number two suddenly nods his head, in some kind of brotherhood agreement, she presumes; "We'll do everything we can to help, you're gonna be ok."

He spoke softly too, she noticed, and so, she told her story to the kind faces stood directly in front of her. She remembers clearly how their eyes never

changed from smiling and gentle. Not moody, not cold, how their hands didn't grip the pen and the realisation floated through her mind that maybe, not all men were the same.

Two more cups of tea. Two hundred or more questions, and the room is bathed entirely now in sunlight and reflections, like a past and a present. The fire is all but dead. The strangers have left. 'You're safe', they'd said.

And everything remains the same. The pictures on the walls, the smiling faces, the vase filled with flowers. And although she sits in the same chair, in the same gown and life goes on; today she appreciates the sunlight dancing around this room. A happiness at hearing two birds chattering, reminding her of new days and new opportunities. The kindness of strangers, in police uniform. A brave daughter's quick thinking and hard decision making. Because of them, she is free to begin again. She is a survivor with hopes and dreams.

'Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still, I'll rise'.

F.W.A. True Story  
I Felt the fear  
I Felt the fear  
it was so near  
it was so near  
something says I felt this before  
when I'd cover window  
so you want see me  
something wrong today  
I need to go but where  
uncomfortable feeling  
getting dressed  
go out.  
something going to happen.  
it has parked his car which means  
I need to ask to get my car out.  
I see the change in his personality  
once more, like Jackell and Hyde,  
got to the stage now I can't trust myself  
a life time of abuse is one thing  
But please don't insult my intelligence  
and stay away as I may not be responsible  
for what I might do.  
I felt the fear.

F.W.A. Her entire Encouragement  
True Testament to L.W.A.  
Character description with qualities I really admire  
The person I am writing about is someone I have got to know quite well and her name for a number of months now she is my support worker through Joye Women's Aid. I could not have been allocated a better person. She is very dedicated to her work. The support she has given me from the beginning is immense. I have come a long way since getting involved with her. At the start she did a consultation where I obtained most useful information. As promised she made regular phone calls to me to check how I was. I am now doing my Journey to Freedom Programme with her on a one to one basis. This has helped me bring a lot of things out into the open, which I maybe could not have done enough a Zoom class. Nothing seems to be a bother to her in her bid to do her very best for you and has made phone calls for me of which I am most grateful. I feel no matter what I'd put to her she could handle. She has a



7.W.A. 1  
 Description of abuser TRUE STORY  
 My abuser is some-one I've known and had in my life for some fifty years & have many splits for him as I've had to obtain separation, accusation, and non molestation orders through the Courts, on other occasions if questioned about things in the marriage, he would abandon me and leave, stay away for months then try to worm his way back into my life again. He has used physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse in order to gain complete control. He has manipulated the children at times things seemed comfortable enough, and I have doubted myself, but the abuse would always return in one form or another & I have come to a stage in my life that I feel I not only want but need to expose this man as an abuser of women, as I now have a strong belief that if more women come forward, as there is now alot of support for them it could solve this problem for what it is and end this scourge in society



F.W.A. 1 TRUE STORY  
 I am a survivor  
 I am a survivor  
 I ask myself, how this could be given all you put me through from a very young age you groomed and molded me into what you wanted of me. in the beginning you lavished me with expensive gifts I had no better knowledge I was forced into early marriage then straight away the abuse began I treated many black eyes, pushed up against a glass door, suffered physical, financial, emotional abuse, abandonment with five children of primary school age, one of these in push chair stage. I've had you manipulate the children, the children understanding me, and at a later stage having to get police and social services involved because of grave concerns within the

# Love Bombing

Wasn't it lovely to be touched wasn't it lovely to be held  
 wasn't it lovely to have company the conversations you held

Wasn't it confusing when he ignored you  
 wasn't it confusing when he glared  
 wasn't it confusing he was all nice again  
 you'll try things differently instead

Wasn't it tiring to please him  
 wasn't it exciting too  
 when your life wasn't your own you felt you had something motherly to do

Wasn't it worrying at night time when you find you couldn't sleep  
 wasn't it worrying when he placed his penis on you  
 laughs like a sneak

Wasn't it worrying when people came to him to fix all their things  
 and he made out that you were nothing  
 the humiliation that stings

Wasn't it dangerous in isolation who's gonna believe you  
 wasn't it dangerous the things you'd find you'd do because he had asked you to

Wasn't it dangerous to be alone with him  
 but this you couldn't see because you thought he's alright  
 it must, be me

Isn't it great but also exhausting your body won't let you rest she's reacting to stimuli  
 sending out an SOS

You've begun to damn yourself why can't I act right  
 and then be okay  
 Make everything alright

And your body she nags you with the thoughts that arise  
 he's called her slut that girl  
 that's not wise

For the sake of others  
 and maybe not your own  
 You will attempt to leave your phone  
 be finding time on your own

Let me say I've made a fool of myself  
 and yes I've paid the price  
 but unfortunately once bitten happened at least thrice

However I understand my addiction  
 to have someone for me  
 and try to Sellotape that  
 into I am worthy

Now I have begun to know myself  
 I feel a lot more at ease  
 me and my body together  
 I hope she forgives me

We have learnt this was a pattern  
 begun with the lowest of self-esteem  
 keeping me from society  
 never wanting to be seen

This made me vulnerable  
 attracted bad behaviours I'd not recognise  
 Because they were so familiar  
 to my childhood eyes

Now I look for connection  
 in a variety of ways  
 So grateful to have been taught  
 How to be loved and  
 to blow, the dangerous away

## Haiku - Strangulation

Your hands around my throat  
 While you told me I would die  
 And I believed you

Our girls in their room  
 Squealing like pigs to slaughter  
 Forever with me

## Haiku - Abuse

I met my soulmate  
 Perfect slowly fades away  
 Not love but abuse



## Broken

This is not the life i want  
My heart is torn apart,  
I am being punished  
For something I did not start.  
I miss my girls so very much  
I miss their laughs and cries  
I miss the hugs and arguments  
I miss their whispers and their sighs.  
I never meant to be unwell  
To hurt my loved ones then,  
I tried to get better quickly-  
I thought he was my friend.  
I thought he loved me  
I could depend on his support  
But instead I'm being punished  
For something I couldn't sort.  
I was too much for him  
I had to go away-  
It was the best thing ever  
Because I didn't want to stay.  
But I would have stayed forever  
To have my children every day,  
Right now my heart is aching  
I can see it start to fray.  
I can't live like this  
I am falling apart  
My life is in pieces  
And so is my heart.  
I feel like I'm at breaking point  
Each time we have to meet.  
I hate the sight and sound of him  
And now i feel defeat.  
I don't know how to live  
Without my girls full time,  
I'm scared of isolation  
And feel this is a sign.  
Someday he might take them  
And never bring them back.  
Or tell them I'm bad for them  
And how I'll soon begin to crack.  
I want them to be happy  
But what sort of life is this?  
Two days at my house  
Then pack and go to his.  
Would they be better off  
Without me in their life?  
Maybe they would be more settled  
They would know less strife.  
I'm lost and falling down  
I need to find a better way  
So i don't feel as if I'm beaten  
Every single day.

I don't want my life to end  
But i don't want to live in fear,  
I want to feel like i deserve  
To have friends and family here.  
I don't want to be isolated  
I need those girls close by,  
I don't know how to live without  
I don't even want to try.

## Conditioned

Conditioned  
To believe  
In nothing else  
But him.  
Conditioned  
To believe  
That I would  
Never win.  
Conditioned  
To feel  
Wrong all the time.  
Conditioned  
To feel  
The blame is mine.  
Conditioned  
To worry  
I'm not good enough.  
Conditioned  
To worry  
I make his life tough.  
Conditioned  
To say  
I'm sorry, I really am.  
Conditioned  
To say  
Whatever keeps him calm.  
Conditioned to listen  
To words  
So untrue.  
Escape now  
To a life  
Bright and new.

## Mind games

Is there  
Someone who'll listen  
Someone who'll care  
Someone who understands  
The story that I share?

My brain likes to play tricks  
As it takes me back to a time,  
When I was happily married  
And everything was fine.

Then all of a sudden  
I am stopped in my tracks,  
Words ringing in my ears  
Taking me right back.

I often hear the awkward silences  
I can feel the icy atmosphere,  
I see myself trying ever so hard  
And in my tummy, I feel the fear.

Always blaming myself for everything  
Striving to be better all the time,  
Looking for that reassurance  
That what I did was not a crime.

Apologising and trying hard  
Was what my life had become,  
Determined to make things better  
But it was a game I never won.

"You're unbearable!" he said,  
"You're more self centred than anyone!  
You are seriously mentally ill..."  
Was this what I'd become?

"I'll give you space," I cried with fear,  
"It's my fault you feel this way.  
I've become too hard to live with."  
I didn't know what else to say.

Deep down inside, I know it's better  
That I managed to break free,  
But part of me is grieving  
For how things were meant to be.

I'm sad that our family house  
Is not the place I can call home.  
I am sad that our children  
Between two parents now must roam.

I am grieving for the married life

I am afraid I never really had,  
I am sorry I couldn't fix the things  
That seemed to make him mad.

As my brain shows me memories,  
Some good, but some not so,  
I wish I could forget what happened  
But of course, those visions will not go.

Support is what I need right now  
When my thoughts rattle round and round,  
I know my friends and family are there  
And in their arms I'm safe and sound.

## Permission

I don't need permission  
To live my life,  
In the way I want  
Without fear or strife.

I don't need permission  
To speak my mind,  
To choose my direction  
My own way to find.

My aim is to be happy  
That's my only goal,  
It's my future now  
And I'm in control.

I need to get to know me  
Find out what i can,  
Do what's best for me  
Follow my own plan.

Trust my instincts  
Listen to my heart,  
Get myself prepared  
For my fresh, new start.



Abuse

The adverts show it incorrectly; abuse comes with a smile, love bombing, romantic well for the first wee while

Domestic abuse, an outdated term  
A house might not be the place  
Wedding ring or engagement Not necessary things

For its a smile and romance  
Or a fixing or helping about  
While the while your own self  
Is being wiped out

Cruelty to an animal  
it's the very same thing  
being held in open captivity because you belong to him

Sometimes you wish he would hit you  
because that would be more clear  
and people can go, "oh how terrible"  
because this is somehow more sincere

it's the manipulation that is so hateful  
Losing the basis of yourself leaving you unwell  
destroying your mental health

And this ain't some misunderstanding  
this is devious and cruel  
this is a power play  
exactly what a paedophile would do

The institutions and the Law  
they haven't caught up  
so people will say "just leave"  
instead of getting them to stop

It's okay to be angry  
when you're being manipulated and preyed upon  
Well intentioned experts, will dangerously get it wrong

And because he is a devious winner  
he's the pillar in his world  
you look like the weirdo  
standing nervously around

He's done his job this parasite but we know  
this game  
have a look at Don Hennessey's book  
How He Wins

This is not your fault  
psychephiles are cruel  
society doesn't know yet  
but Women's Aid do.



Breathe

The stillness  
Hold my breath in  
So quiet  
Not a sway all so still  
Hold my breath  
The wood pigeon coos  
A fly zisses past  
But movement is there  
I blink — stillness is broken  
growth takes all shape, grass grows,  
weeds shoot, my heart expands with each  
breath of air exhaled  
Fluffy white clouds move, gracefully dance  
and change shape softly intertwine  
Thoughts run run through my head  
Stillness doesn't last long  
'Breathe'

Where

Where am I going?  
Where am I going?  
I am not sure yet  
I do not know  
I am not free yet to choose  
I am not yet me  
Where am I going

Domestic Abuse

Thank you Women's Aid for making this no longer  
an issue that is too often 'hidden'. Instead for me,  
you have created a new outlook, the possibility  
for 'us'

- H – Hope
- I – Idolise Ourselves
- D – Delight in life
- D – Do our choices
- E – Enjoy life
- N – Never enduring abuse again

Thank you my fab support worker and everyone  
within Women's Aid





# Our Voices

The Creative Writing of Survivors  
of Domestic Abuse

