

# “And Still, I rise”

An inspirational art exhibition by Kat Shaw.

85 women, 1 artist.

Read the amazing stories of “the survivors”

1	I survived domestic abuse	<p><u>I survived domestic abuse</u> My ex-partner and father to my child abused me physically, psychologically, sexually and financially. I suffered the abuse throughout my pregnancy to the extent that I could have lost my unborn child at the time because of the physical abuse. The abuse didn't stop until I decided to say no more, I made this decision when my daughter was only a couple of months old in 2015. The abuse didn't end there though... he continued to attempt to contact me, harassed my friends, my family, made fake social media accounts and turned people I thought were friends against me. It's not the physical harm that hurts me the most it's the psychology impact that doesn't go away, flashbacks, triggers (music, sounds, smells) PTSD and anxiety. I did everything to try and get justice, police reports, legal action, children services, doctor appointments and contacted support organisations. Unfortunately, I was failed by the system... but in 2019 I was made to go to court over child contact. I'll be honest this felt like the worst time of my life. I had no choice but to have to face my abuser again. During this time though, I truly took my power back and I was being heard. I decided to stand up for myself, I told my story to people I didn't want to. I faced him on several occasions and stood tall showing no weakness. Domestic abuse was taken seriously, finally I was believed. One thing I'm certain about is, I will never give up. I will keep being the goddess that I am. I will keep fighting for justice and standing up for what I believe in. I will keep doing this not only for myself and my family but for all the wonderful people who are survivor's and for the future generation. We deserve to live in peace and happiness, we are strong warrior's and nothing can and will stop us surviving. And still, I rise!</p>
2	I survived homelessness	<p><u>I survived homelessness</u> I am a survivor of many things, including: Domestic abuse, Chronic fatigue syndrome, HIV, homelessness and PTSD. I was arrested 5 years ago because I grabbed the arm of a policemen who tasered my son in front of me. I thought he was dead and did what any mother would do in defence of their child but ended</p>

		<p>up arrested and kept overnight in the cells – one of the worst nights of my life. Of course there is a back story to it all that involved my children’s father being arrested and subsequently imprisoned for sexually assaulting his child to his second marriage 9 my son’s youngest sister). Together we, my adult children and I, are still surviving that – I guess we always will be. In fact, I think that’s the nature of survival – we are always surviving that which we have endured – the healing work is in transforming that which has caused the trauma and I’ve worked hard on that over the years. My psychologist calls it Post Traumatic growth based on the idea that ‘out of shit, roses grow!’</p> <p>I survived because of some of the amazing women in my life who believed in me when I couldn’t. Who held up the goddess energy so I could learn to be a warrior and embrace the goddess within.</p> <p>I am 56. A mother, a grandmother, a poet and much more.</p> <p><u>Warrior woman</u></p> <p>This is my brave face, full of courage, and daring.  My eyes hold steady, unafraid and true.  This mouth smiles confidently; laughs, talks and sings,  whilst these lips kiss tenderly like a mother,  or with the passion of a lover if, you happen to be the lucky one!  These are the arms spread wide to embrace you  or curled in tight to cradle a child.  They shield and protect, carry, restore,  would hold you now and forever more.  These are the feet, with toes painted red,  that march into battle, can dance all night long.  These are the feet that stand firm with conviction  and move with new rhythm to the off beat of the drum.  And here are the cascading tears of sorrow, that fashioned  and moulded and carved this brave face.  And here, weathered hands that are empty with longing  for the touch of your fingers, with mine, interlaced.  And here, the womb that gave life to my children,  who long ago left for a life of their own.  And these legs yearn for rest, yet carry on walking  with tired feet, that I soak at the end of the day.  And here is my heart, repeatedly broken, by the scars  and the war wounds that keep sculpting me strong.</p>
3	I survived my lover committing	<p><u>I survived my lover committing suicide beside me</u></p> <p>Once upon a time, a girl was born. She was quickly followed by one brother...and in a few years, another. When she was about 9, her grandfather introduced her to secret sexual activity. She was terrified and ashamed. When her grandfather died, she believed the monster was gone.</p>

<p>suicide beside me</p>	<p>Soon she was a budding teen and she began to act out. She had no idea why. When she had had her heart broken for the first time, she lost the feeling of being valuable. She'd given herself and been rejected. In her attempt to feel wanted again, she responded to the first "I love you" with kisses and freely given consent. It took one night only with that 16 year old boy, and the 15 year old girl was expecting. She didn't tell her parents until she was 6 months along, the baby's father and his family were against it and her co-dependent mother had been denied the time to intervene and "erase" her pregnancy before the secret was out. She thought the storms had calmed, but there were so many more to come. She left school and got her qualifications. Not an adult, but no longer a child.</p> <p>When she was of age, she met a man that she thought herself "in love" with. The truth was though, that this was sadly more evidence of that lost value. He had been the boyfriend of her dearest friend, and sadly she valued his pursuit of her more than she did the friendship. She saw a flash of that valuable feeling she'd lost long ago and betrayed her own heart to have him. They were soon married and a second child immediately followed. Her first son was only just turning 3.</p> <p>Recognition that ingredients without a recipe was a disaster, happened almost immediately. Infidelity, anger, verbal and physical abuse then divorce. Her daughter was not even 2. Time went on and her attempts to ease her pain ran the gamut. Sex, drugs, secret lives - leading to a 2nd marriage. A second divorce would follow as well. Then, another explosion. The biggest storm yet. The girl was grown and working 2 jobs to pay the bills. Her marriage had come after a suicide attempt, and she was held under threat of no commitment unless she agreed to counselling. She agreed and got the commitment, but in the state she was in, never saw that she was going home to a monster. Her mother rejected her, but took her children on so they wouldn't be homeless and the girl allowed her second husband to take her to live several hours away from everyone she knew.</p> <p>Once she'd enrolled in school as he had also done, she was able to secure school housing and retrieved her kids. Her counselling abandoned, she had gone back to survival mode. Ups and downs filled their days and there were always problems and pain. Finally, she ran out of ways to juggle and followed him again. This time she added some chains around her own ankles; she switched financial responsibility for the apartment to herself so that his credits were available for transfer, making her a drop out who was "locked out" until the debt was paid. She never did get that "key".</p> <p>She struggled and her mental state was unstable as the time passed. Her husband would not work. He did not keep the house or do repairs. He had eventually graduated, but claimed that depression and trauma kept him at home.</p> <p>She turned to God. The hard loving Baptist God she had grown up hearing about.</p> <p>She began to journal in the mornings. Began to see deeper truths. She began asking for the "truth" about her marriage.</p> <p>When the truth came, it came like a bomb. He had been molesting her daughter since before she was in school. And her daughter was now 13.</p> <p>Her daughter had told her school counsellor. Then her. The woman separated from him in the hope he would, of course, correct his bad behaviour and that they could move forward. But her daughter was terrified she would allow him to come back.</p> <p>Her prayers had been heard and this was the "truth".</p> <p>She was furious.... with him, with herself, with God.</p> <p>Jumping backward a thousand paces and upping the ante on every bad response was the way it happened. She was dying. Sex again. Drugs again. Food. No coping skills. And so much pain. She ballooned to over 300lbs. At 38 years old, she'd been working at a job that had good</p>
--------------------------	--

		<p>benefits and so was able to have a gastric bypass. Her life exploded again. With all of her dreams of losing the weight coming true, and all of the realities of the wounds underneath exposed suddenly, she crumbled. Again.</p> <p>Anxiety over a changing body and the devastation the weight left behind caused those old responses to flare. Soon she was madly in love and living a fantasy with yet another disaster waiting to happen. By the time she understood that she couldn't support another bird if her own wings were broken, she was drinking whiskey straight and blacking out almost nightly. That bird would soon kill himself. Another bomb exploding. This one in the dark. Late at night. A bullet left the gun, as she lay passed out next to him in her bed. She was woken with that flash, but he would never wake again.</p> <p>She survived the shock, the alcohol haze not quite concealing the way her fingers dipped into the wound. She tried to bandage his head. She survived the search for the telephone. The panic, as she only found broken pieces of it. The drive to his brother's house, only a mile away, looking for help. She survived the sudden barking orders to call 911. She survived the crushing reality of what had happened when she was told he had shot himself. She survived the memory of stepping over the gun and wondering at it being there, never understanding its presence. She survived the realization that she had assumed the mess was from a fall he had taken, and instead the result of a drunken dispute. She survived the police. The Catholic family and their grief. She survived the blame. She survived. But she did not do it perfectly. She dove into the bottle for years. He had died in 2005. By 2007, she'd managed to alienate everyone but the fringe dwellers. She'd stopped drinking for a bit, but attention from a biker was just the diversion she needed to escape and alcohol quickly set it on fire. She ended up in jail on a domestic violence charge. Homeless and without a car, she had alienated even the worst of the outlaws and had managed to inspire a biker to call the police on her and then her other to bail her out. She left jail with her mother, unknowingly headed to dysfunctional house arrest for a year. She survived that too. She managed to quit drinking and attended a support group and that helped. She was awarded disability for severe depression, anxiety, and ptsd. She found a little house to put her money towards that she could afford to live in. She rebuilt relationships with her kids and was able to be joyfully involved with her grands. The coming years would be spent creating a life that felt good. She would rekindle a romance and fall in love again. A life with art and creative expression. A life with spirituality. A bigger picture of who God might be. A life learning to love herself.</p> <p>I am that girl. Now, with so many grands and so many more years survived. I am now living my true happily ever after in creating a love story with myself and the beautiful life I am building as I go. I survived.</p>
4	I survived PTSD	<u>I survived PTSD</u>
5	I survived redundancy	<p><u>I survived redundancy</u></p> <p>I am surviving my life. With love. With humour. With hunger for more.</p> <p>I married too young. He was older, kind, clever, generous, but lacking faith in his own worth and frequently depressed.</p> <p>To ask what he'd done today was to challenge him, and to suggest he needed help was to insult him. I walked on eggshells.</p> <p>My work was my source of connection, achievement, strength, and I immersed myself in it, but I was being dragged down by him, and for my sake and my children's I needed to escape, and after sixteen years I did.</p> <p>Redundancy came on the same week I moved out and was an unexpectedly cruel blow, one that more than a decade later can still blindside me with a visceral punch of betrayal.</p> <p>But I survived. And still I rise.</p>

6	I have survived never knowing how to love myself	<u>I have survived never knowing how to love myself</u>
7	I survived postnatal depression	<u>I survived postnatal depression</u> I did. But I now love these stretch marks because they are literally proof of life from my womb that birthed two beautiful sons.
8	I survived sexual abuse	<u>I survived sexual abuse</u> I don't believe my story is different from most. Childhood trauma Leads us down a path of co-dependent and abusive relationships. Like many women I have survived childhood sexual assault (I endured a childhood of sexual abuse from my stepfather) and as well as this he was very violent towards my mother. I had no example of what a loving relationship should be like and I was manipulated and groomed by a narcissist. This set the tone for my romantic relationships, where I ended up with narcissists and abusers. One of whom I lost a baby to. I don't mind saying now, but that perhaps was a blessing in disguise. I have also survived rape at a time where I was pressing charges against my stepfather and not being believed or supported by my husband, leading to the breakdown in our marriage. As someone who wasn't healed, I ended up in another relationship and marriage with a narcissist and abuser. I found myself in a similar situation as my mother but thought it was ok because it wasn't to the same extreme or as frequent. Anyway. I'm coming up to 40, a twice divorced single working mother who has a circle of similarly affected women who have all drawn great strength and got amazing healing from each other. So in spite of the things I have been through. I stand strong and Independent and confident in myself. Everyone who tried to hurt me or tear me down have failed. It's taken me a long time to get here but I am here and I stand proud of the trauma that I have healed from. Fearless that no matter what life throws at me I will handle it. I am grace. I am beauty. I am power. I look back at the person I once was and I am proud of her for surviving.
9	I survive with chronic pain and depression	<u>I survive with chronic pain and depression</u> The things I have survived & some I still live with are various illnesses, medical issues, major surgery, abuse, eating disorder, trauma, toxic relationships, chronic pain, anxiety & PTSD. I am also a single mum, and I survive every day with depression.
10	I survived a mental breakdown	<u>I survived a mental breakdown</u>
11	I survived being cut out of a crushed car	<u>I survived being cut out of a crushed car</u> The number one thing that stands out is that I had a serious car accident when I was 21. I fell asleep at the wheel of my car on the A14. I had to be cut out by the emergency services and rushed to hospital. I came away with minor injuries and everyone said it was a miracle I SURVIVED.

12	I survived bulimia	<p><u>I survived bulimia</u>  I'm a survivor. I've battled binge eating and bulimia. I also have narcolepsy which has been a struggle. I've got lots of stretch marks from losing and gaining weight from binge eating/bulimia.  My relationship with my body in the past has been one of hatred, anger, never good enough. I couldn't even take selfies of myself. So when I saw this chance to be involved in this project, I knew after all of the work I had done to heal myself that the universe was asking me to step up.</p>
13	I survived panic attacks	<p><u>I survived panic attacks</u>  The racing heart. The palpitations. The need to go to the loo immediately. The pins and needles. The hot flush. The tingling fingers. The difficulty in breathing. The sweating. The shivering jaw. The full body shake. The feeling of floating outside of your body. The desperation to run. Then the realisation of knowing that you cannot run from your own thoughts. The terror of the impending doom. The sadness that you will have to endure another panic attack. The fear that you are crazy and that this is your life. Still, I survive.</p>
14	I survived childhood sexual abuse	<p><u>I survived Childhood sexual abuse</u>  My journey to becoming a mother wasn't an easy one. As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, the thought of becoming a mother terrified me. How was I going to keep this little person safe? My baby was very much wanted and was conceived in love, after a long wait due to issues with my fertility. I'd always had a tough relationship with my body, turning the anger about what happened to me inwards. I spent many years rejecting every part of myself, so to all of sudden have something so precious growing inside the body I had hated for so long was very confusing. I began to think, if my body was so horrible how had it created such a miracle? I tried to support myself but throughout my pregnancy I felt alone as memories of past trauma surfaced. The time came to bring my baby in to the world. I was frightened at the prospect of being so very vulnerable again. Unfortunately, my baby's birth was very traumatic and triggered symptoms of PTSD, eventually culminating in an emergency c-section and Postnatal Anxiety. It felt like a very dark time in the months that followed. Through all of the tough times though, something amazing happened. As soon as I had my baby in my arms, I could no longer find the hatred for my body. I looked down and all I saw was a miracle. In my arms, and in my own body for creating something so amazing. I have spent the last few years piecing myself back together, in my new body and in my new role as mother. Slowly, with much love and support my body and mind began to heal. And as I looked at the beautiful miracle I had brought earth side, for the first time since childhood, I felt able to welcome my body back with loving arms. I have not only managed in the face of my experiences. I have not only survived. But I am happy to say, finally...I have thrived. After perusing many healing modalities over the years, becoming a mother to my beautiful baby, even in difficult circumstances, turned out to be the most healing experience of all.</p>
15	I survived psychological abuse	<p><u>I survived psychological abuse</u>  My ex-partner and father to my child abused me physically, psychologically, sexually and financially. I suffered the abuse throughout my pregnancy to the extent that I could have lost my unborn child at the time because of the physical abuse.  The abuse didn't stop until I decided to say no more, I made this decision when my daughter was only a couple of months old in 2015.  The abuse didn't end there though... he continued to attempt to contact me, harassed my friends, my family, made fake social media accounts and turned people I thought were friends against me.  It's not the physical harm that hurts me the most it's the psychology impact that doesn't go away, flashbacks, triggers (music, sounds, smells) PTSD and anxiety.  I did everything to try and get justice, police reports, legal action, children services, doctor appointments and contacted support organisations.</p>

		<p>Unfortunately, I was failed by the system... but in 2019 I was made to go to court over child contact. I'll be honest this felt like the worst time of my life. I had no choice but to have to face my abuser again. During this time though, I truly took my power back and I was being heard. I decided to stand up for myself, I told my story to people I didn't want to. I faced him on several occasions and stood tall showing no weakness. Domestic abuse was taken seriously, finally I was believed.</p> <p>One thing I'm certain about is, I will never give up. I will keep being the goddess that I am. I will keep fighting for justice and standing up for what I believe in. I will keep doing this not only for myself and my family but for all the wonderful people who are survivor's and for the future generation.</p> <p>We deserve to live in peace and happiness, we are strong warrior's and nothing can and will stop us surviving.</p> <p>And still, I rise!</p>
16	I survive life	<p><u>I survive life</u></p> <p>I survive life. Frequently. Daily.</p> <p>I survived death. The death of my dad. Suddenly.</p> <p>Even though I didn't want to at times.</p> <p>I survive living on this planet. Every day.</p> <p>With all that I see and witness. That sometimes brings me to my knees.</p> <p>Both from the beauty and kindness I see and experience ... and from the deep hurt and unkindness I see us perpetrate on ourselves each other, animals and the planet.</p> <p>I survived childhood. Religion. Relationships.</p> <p>Jobs. Society.</p> <p>Many places and people ... that loved me ... dictated to me ... at times controlled me ... desired to be like me ... desired me to be like them ... to fit in .... desired to make me feel inadequate just as I was.</p> <p>And despite its challenges, I grew up in to a beautiful woman.</p> <p>A woman I don't always like very much.</p> <p>A woman whose body and very self I have been ashamed of at times.</p> <p>Whose needs and desires I have ignored and been inconsiderate of many times.</p> <p>And a woman who forgives me over and over. A woman who loves life.</p> <p>And who lives it. As best as she can. Each and every day.</p> <p>And I honour that woman.</p> <p>For she is me.</p>
17	I survived a suicide attempt	<p><u>I survived a suicide attempt</u></p> <p>Once upon a time, a girl was born. She was quickly followed by one brother...and in a few years, another. When she was about 9, her grandfather introduced her to secret sexual activity. She was terrified and ashamed. When her grandfather died, she believed the monster was gone.</p> <p>Soon she was a budding teen and she began to act out. She had no idea why.</p> <p>When she had had her heart broken for the first time, she lost the feeling of being valuable. She'd given herself and been rejected. In her attempt to feel wanted again, she responded to the first "I love you" with kisses and freely given consent. It took one night only with that 16</p>

year old boy, and the 15 year old girl was expecting. She didn't tell her parents until she was 6 months along, the baby's father and his family were against it and her co-dependent mother had been denied the time to intervene and "erase" her pregnancy before the secret was out. She thought the storms had calmed, but there were so many more to come. She left school and got her qualifications. Not an adult, but no longer a child.

When she was of age, she met a man that she thought herself "in love" with. The truth was though, that this was sadly more evidence of that lost value. He had been the boyfriend of her dearest friend, and sadly she valued his pursuit of her more than she did the friendship. She saw a flash of that valuable feeling she'd lost long ago and betrayed her own heart to have him. They were soon married and a second child immediately followed. Her first son was only just turning 3.

Recognition that ingredients without a recipe was a disaster, happened almost immediately. Infidelity, anger, verbal and physical abuse then divorce. Her daughter was not even 2. Time went on and her attempts to ease her pain ran the gamut. Sex, drugs, secret lives - leading to a 2nd marriage. A second divorce would follow as well. Then, another explosion. The biggest storm yet. The girl was grown and working 2 jobs to pay the bills. Her marriage had come after a suicide attempt, and she was held under threat of no commitment unless she agreed to counselling. She agreed and got the commitment, but in the state she was in, never saw that she was going home to a monster.

Her mother rejected her, but took her children on so they wouldn't be homeless and the girl allowed her second husband to take her to live several hours away from everyone she knew.

Once she'd enrolled in school as he had also done, she was able to secure school housing and retrieved her kids. Her counselling abandoned, she had gone back to survival mode. Ups and downs filled their days and there were always problems and pain. Finally, she ran out of ways to juggle and followed him again. This time she added some chains around her own ankles; she switched financial responsibility for the apartment to herself so that his credits were available for transfer, making her a drop out who was "locked out" until the debt was paid. She never did get that "key".

She struggled and her mental state was unstable as the time passed. Her husband would not work. He did not keep the house or do repairs. He had eventually graduated, but claimed that depression and trauma kept him at home.

She turned to God. The hard loving Baptist God she had grown up hearing about.

She began to journal in the mornings. Began to see deeper truths. She began asking for the "truth" about her marriage.

When the truth came, it came like a bomb. He had been molesting her daughter since before she was in school. And her daughter was now 13.

Her daughter had told her school counsellor. Then her. The woman separated from him in the hope he would, of course, correct his bad behaviour and that they could move forward. But her daughter was terrified she would allow him to come back.

Her prayers had been heard and this was the "truth".

She was furious.... with him, with herself, with God.

Jumping backward a thousand paces and upping the ante on every bad response was the way it happened. She was dying. Sex again. Drugs again. Food. No coping skills. And so much pain. She ballooned to over 300lbs. At 38 years old, she'd been working at a job that had good benefits and so was able to have a gastric bypass. Her life exploded again. With all of her dreams of losing the weight coming true, and all of the realities of the wounds underneath exposed suddenly, she crumbled. Again.

Anxiety over a changing body and the devastation the weight left behind caused those old responses to flare. Soon she was madly in love and living a fantasy with yet another disaster waiting to happen. By the time she understood that she couldn't support another bird if her own

		<p>wings were broken, she was drinking whiskey straight and blacking out almost nightly. That bird would soon kill himself. Another bomb exploding. This one in the dark. Late at night. A bullet left the gun, as she lay passed out next to him in her bed. She was woken with that flash, but he would never wake again.</p> <p>She survived the shock, the alcohol haze not quite concealing the way her fingers dipped into the wound. She tried to bandage his head. She survived the search for the telephone. The panic, as she only found broken pieces of it. The drive to his brother's house, only a mile away, looking for help. She survived the sudden barking orders to call 911. She survived the crushing reality of what had happened when she was told he had shot himself. She survived the memory of stepping over the gun and wondering at it being there, never understanding its presence. She survived the realization that she had assumed the mess was from a fall he had taken, and instead the result of a drunken dispute. She survived the police. The Catholic family and their grief. She survived the blame. She survived. But she did not do it perfectly. She dove into the bottle for years. He had died in 2005. By 2007, she'd managed to alienate everyone but the fringe dwellers. She'd stopped drinking for a bit, but attention from a biker was just the diversion she needed to escape and alcohol quickly set it on fire. She ended up in jail on a domestic violence charge. Homeless and without a car, she had alienated even the worst of the outlaws and had managed to inspire a biker to call the police on her and then her other to bail her out. She left jail with her mother, unknowingly headed to dysfunctional house arrest for a year. She survived that too. She managed to quit drinking and attended a support group and that helped. She was awarded disability for severe depression, anxiety, and ptsd. She found a little house to put her money towards that she could afford to live in. She rebuilt relationships with her kids and was able to be joyfully involved with her grands. The coming years would be spent creating a life that felt good. She would rekindle a romance and fall in love again. A life with art and creative expression. A life with spirituality. A bigger picture of who God might be. A life learning to love herself.</p> <p>I am that girl. Now, with so many grands and so many more years survived. I am now living my true happily ever after in creating a love story with myself and the beautiful life I am building as I go. I survived.</p>
18	I survived oppression from my ex husband	<p><u>I survived oppression from my ex</u></p> <p>My body &amp; soul has loved and protected me through childhood broken limbs, head trauma, perceived hurts. It nurtured me as I birthed my sons, taking the scars and worries that pregnancy causes &amp; turning it into unconditional love. It supported me through years of emotional abuse &amp; some physical. Those were dark days but I'm still here! When my ability to reproduce was removed I mourned the loss but that little flame didn't go out &amp; when i needed strength it turned into a roaring flame and boosted me. I'm still here, stronger than ever!</p>
19	I survived complex childhood PTSD	<p><u>I survived complex childhood PTSD</u></p> <p>For the past year I've been on a journey to heal from my complex childhood PTSD. It's been a long, hard road but for the first time ever, I feel like I'm living instead of just surviving.</p> <p>My siblings and I endured some pretty horrific emotional, mental, financial and physical abuse at the hands of our parents. It wasn't until I had kids of my own that I was able to start recognizing it for what it was. It took my relationship falling apart and finding myself living my greatest fears for me to finally face up to what I had endured all those years.</p> <p>Now I am happy to report that I have broken free from the cycles of abuse. It meant cutting off most of my toxic family, a lot of remembering and releasing things I had been trying too long to hide. It took realizing I had spent my entire life stuck in survival mode and a I to thrive instead.</p> <p>I'm still not where I want to be, but I can see myself for the masterpiece and work in progress I am. I know that I will continue to rebuild a life of purpose that inspires me. And most importantly of all, I know my children will grow up in a safe and loving home.</p>

20	I survived a miscarriage	<p><u>I survived a miscarriage</u>  After losing my dad in a car accident five years ago, we have spent the last 3 trying for our second baby. After multiple very early miscarriages we were overjoyed to have an early scan and see our baby's heartbeat. Unfortunately, we lost that baby at 10 weeks - in a traumatic manner with baby coming at home in a very recognisable way. I've been unable to have another child since and have been told I have secondary infertility. However, I remain ever hopeful to be blessed with a happy and healthy sibling for my beautiful son who is the most amazing child.</p>
21	I survive being a single mum	<p><u>I survive being a single mum</u>  My daughters dad moved out when she was 4 weeks old. It was the lowest point ever. I had a baby who didn't sleep – at all. I was totally on my own in a town that I had only moved to 7 months before to start a new family. I would be up all night, rocking a screaming bay with absolutely no idea what I was doing. And even in the odd 5 minutes or so that she slept, I stayed awake to check she was breathing. I would walk around parks on the weekend and see all the families, tears streaming down my face, wondering why it had worked out for them and not me. And to make matters worse, my daughters dad was not a particularly pleasant character, offering daily threats and abusive words. The logistics of being a single parent are hard. The lifts, trying to juggle work with after school clubs and play dates. The feelings of inadequacy because society calls it a “broken home”. The stabs of jealousy as your friends husbands change their plans so they can look after the kids for the night whilst their wives go out. The babysitting fees, and the worry that they're not being looked after properly even when paying for someone to do it. The need to do everything on your own – washing, cooking, car repairs, work, cleaning, gardening... every single thing you can imagine on your shoulders. The constant stress that you are the only person supporting the family and that if you go under, there is nobody to pick up the slack. The nights spent sat up worrying that you're making the wrong choices. The decisions you make totally alone because there is nobody else to discuss alternative solutions with. The times your child has banged their head and you're not sure whether they're safe to go to sleep yet, so you sit up to check they are still breathing. The illnesses. The sleep deprivation. Worrying that every single decision you make is fucking your child up. Not wanting them to end up like you. The ignored judgment on others faces when you correct the presumed “Mrs” to “Miss”. The constant looking around wondering why it worked out for others and not you. The fake pleased face when you hear about your friends exotic holidays, knowing that your single wage doesn't even cover your rent. The feelings of having failed. The humiliation of having to tell your child's school that you cannot afford the school trip. The guilt at bringing your child up alone when you so desperately wanted them to have a balanced life. The rage when a friend drops in “my husband has worked away this week – I feel like a single parent”. Because, unless you are a single parent, you will NEVER EVER know how it feels. The searing pain. The loneliness. The isolation. The never-ending worry that you are enough of a parent to do the job of two. And one of the worst things about being a single parent is the happy memories. The times when your child gets a certificate for being star of the week. Their first day at school. And there is nobody to celebrate with. Yet another parent consultation evening celebrating your child on your own. Watching your child walk down the street for their first day at secondary school and crying silent tears because you are standing alone. Watching her screaming in intense pain and being the only person there to hear those cries.</p> <p>And then the teenage years begin and nothing could have ever prepared you for that. Because all of a sudden, the anxiety kicks up a notch as, not only are you dealing with the moods, but you realise that the child you adore and have dedicated your life to keeping safe needs to go it alone. You cannot keep them safe any more as they begin to investigate their independence. You cannot take away their teenage pain or their hormonal mood swings. You cannot monitor their social media 24 hours a day, so instead you live with the fear that they're being cyber bullied or groomed online. The fear that they will get their drink spiked or make stupid decisions that will impact their safety. Yet, you keep it inside, smiling and letting them flourish and grow – with nobody else to take even one percent of the worry you carry. Your dreams for your</p>

		<p>child, your hopes... ass shouldered alone. Hoping desperately every single second of every day that you have put the foundations in and that they will make the right choices... sex, drugs, alcohol – the late nights, learning to drive. Watching from the sidelines. Hoping that they make informed decisions. Hoping they make it through.</p> <p>As my daughter starts to spread her wings and I have to let her go, I Hope that I have done enough to teach her how to look after herself in the world. I Hope that I have been enough.</p> <p>And though the struggle has been beyond any words I can even think of, I look at my daughter with pride. Because I have done it. I have survived and I will continue to survive.</p>
22	I survive daily with suicidal thoughts	<p><u>I survive daily with suicidal thoughts</u></p> <p>I was first exposed to suicide when I was around 6/7 years old. My half brother has bipolar and at that point had a depressive episode which led to him moving in with me, my mum and our dad. During that time, he made multiple suicide attempts. I assume because of my age no one really talked to me about how he had an illness, or what suicide was. As a result, I made my own internal explanations of it all. My brother had lots of problems. He didn't know how to solve them. Suicide was his solution.</p> <p>As a result, by the age of 24 I had made four suicide attempts. There were different final straws which broke my back for 3 of them. The first 2 were within a few weeks of each other when I was 16, my first love ended things with me over text in the middle of the night. The final event for the 3rd attempt was a breakdown in relationship between me and my mum, after my dad died, leading to more dependence on my then husband in our spiralling abusive relationship. The 4<sup>th</sup> straw was years of trauma, loss, chronic lack of self-love, care, respect and boundaries. I was running on a 3-4-year cycle. For 3-4 years I could exist as I was, not loving myself, putting everything and everything above and beyond myself to unhealthy levels. Allowing people to trample over me, use me and then disregard me. After my 4th attempt I very nearly died. Doctors from all over the hospital came to see me when I came out of my coma to see if it were true. I knew there and then, that if I didn't learn to change, I would be dead in 5 years time.</p> <p>Much of the trauma and hurt had been for the most part out of my control. But the lack of boundaries, self-love and care, was within my control and I needed to address my demons and learn new habits.</p> <p>2 weeks after my 4th suicide attempt I started volunteering for a suicide prevention charity. 3 months later I had a paid position. I probably attribute too much of my success to the charity, in that I should be kinder to myself. The charity and the opportunities, learning and skills I developed were the springboard. But now isn't a time to be humble or modest. Now is a time to celebrate the goddess that I am. My work provided me with opportunities which without, I would not be where I am. But it was my attitude, authenticity, empathy and adaptability that were the blocks of my success.</p> <p>I owe all of those things to my life experience; however pleasant or horrific phases have been. My overwhelming moto in life is to use all the shit that has happened to me for good. If something positive can come from it, if I can help one person, and be in a better place now, then it was worth it. For over two years suicide prevention was my absolute mission, educating, supporting, preventing, teaching, and continuing to learn myself.</p> <p>In December 2019, a series of events led to, in ways, my biggest challenge yet. I found myself in an impossible situation, where I felt like whichever option I took, it was unfair. That I did not deserve to be in the situation I was. I was bitter, resentful and trapped. I came face to face with my first significant and enduring suicidal thoughts since August 2017. Despite all that I had learned, all the training I had completed, it didn't help when it was me that I had to save.</p>

		<p>Somehow, I survived it. I don't really know how, apart from taking it minute by minute. Taking the option out of my hands by placing myself in social situations where I knew I'd be safe and delaying any decision to the next hour. Thank god, earlier that day my mum had come in and told me, if I needed to resign from my job without another job, I should do it. So, I sat on my front step and wrote my resignation letter. As soon as I hit send, I felt like me again. The weight I had been battling with had lifted. I was once again at peace.</p> <p>During that time so many people told me to have faith, and that it wouldn't be long until someone snapped me up. At times I lost faith, I struggled with the uncertainty. But then I had a moment of clarity and decided that these weeks of unemployment would be used to improve my health and fitness. To form new habits, so that by the time I was working again it would be easier to sustain these new healthier habits. It took me 4 weeks from my last working day to find another job. Another job which suited my health needs as much as the first had.</p> <p>So where am I now? I've survived suicidal thoughts without acting on them. I've learnt more about my worth and my ability. People keep asking me when I am going to get a break. That I'm always dealing with so much. But remember diamonds only form when they're put under extreme pressure. Who knows, 2020 might be my year where I get break, or maybe it's another year where I continue grafting every day to give myself the life I want and roll with the punches otherwise. Either way, I'll be damn sure to make it the best I possibly can.</p>
23	I survived lymphoma	<u>I survived Lymphoma</u>
24	I survived a ruptured appendix and colon tumour	<p><u>I survived a ruptured appendix and colon tumour</u></p> <p>I had abdominal surgery for ruptured appendix and a tumour on colon (May 2018), which was nearly fatal.</p>
25	I survived flashbacks of rape	<p><u>I survived flashbacks of rape</u></p> <p>I had a lot of flashbacks of my rape. Flashbacks of the rape and of the exact moment that I knew he had control over me. My screaming "NO" didn't stop him.</p> <p>But then I remember seeing my rapist at the club I met him at a while after it had happened. He was looking at me and talking about me with his friends. They were all laughing at me. I had also found out that I was the source of ridicule by many people, as one of my so-called friends had told everybody what happened.</p> <p>In that club, the shame came back... but that was my last flashback. At that moment, I pulled my shoulders back and looked through them all and walked on by.</p>
26	I survived anal cancer	<p><u>I survived anal cancer</u></p> <p>In life there are scars that we see, scars that are hidden and those that lie buried deep inside of us.</p> <p>Some of my scars come from having had bum cancer, anal cancer to be precise. It's still a taboo cancer. Hardly ever spoken about and very little support. There's very little merchandising with the word ANAL on it! The word 'anal' still embarrasses most people despite the fact we use that part of our body all the time. We rely on it. It's important.</p> <p>Anal cancer can affect your bum inside and/or out. I needed surgery to remove mine, most of which was on the outside of me. This meant also having to have reconstructive surgery which meant my bum and perineal /vaginal area would never look the same again. A constant reminder.</p> <p>I also had to have a colostomy for a while until everything was healed. They are the physical, the visual scars on my tummy that tell just part of the frightening and difficult cancer journey that's hidden elsewhere.</p>

		<p>Having a cancer diagnosis changed me. It's frightening and scary and I felt powerless. The people around me who love me felt all this too. But you realise all that's important, all that's not been done or said. It makes you focus, quickly, just in case. I was lucky to only need surgery but the threat of cancer coming back never leaves. A constant reminder to not take life for granted and to have gratitude for what I have now and to be thankful for living in a country where we have great and free healthcare.</p> <p>My scars are my battles  My scars are my pain  My scars are my beauty  My scars bear no shame.  My scars are my wisdom  My scars help me see  My scars are my strength  My scars, they are me.  My scars they're my stories  My scars help me thrive  My scars tell the world  No matter what, I survive.</p>
27	I survived physical abuse	<p><u>I survived physical abuse</u>  My ex-partner and father to my child abused me physically, psychologically, sexually and financially. I suffered the abuse throughout my pregnancy to the extent that I could have lost my unborn child at the time because of the physical abuse.  The abuse didn't stop until I decided to say no more, I made this decision when my daughter was only a couple of months old in 2015.  The abuse didn't end there though... he continued to attempt to contact me, harassed my friends, my family, made fake social media accounts and turned people I thought were friends against me.  It's not the physical harm that hurts me the most it's the psychology impact that doesn't go away, flashbacks, triggers (music, sounds, smells) PTSD and anxiety.  I did everything to try and get justice, police reports, legal action, children services, doctor appointments and contacted support organisations. Unfortunately, I was failed by the system... but in 2019 I was made to go to court over child contact. I'll be honest this felt like the worst time of my life. I had no choice but to have to face my abuser again. During this time though, I truly took my power back and I was being heard. I decided to stand up for myself, I told my story to people I didn't want to. I faced him on several occasions and stood tall showing no weakness. Domestic abuse was taken seriously, finally I was believed.  One thing I'm certain about is, I will never give up. I will keep being the goddess that I am. I will keep fighting for justice and standing up for what I believe in. I will keep doing this not only for myself and my family but for all the wonderful people who are survivor's and for the future generation.  We deserve to live in peace and happiness, we are strong warrior's and nothing can and will stop us surviving.  And still, I rise!</p>

28	I survive the voices in my head	<p><u>I survived the voices in my head</u>  THE DAY THE VOICES STOPPED  I am going to tell my story in reverse. We begin at the ending, the day I no longer heard their voices in my head.  I was standing in the bathroom looking myself in the mirror; my self hatred had reached critical mass. The voices in my head were screaming at this point; "you're a worthless failure; you're disgusting, fat and ugly; no one could or will ever love you..." The voices of my demons kept getting louder and louder. Although especially loud in that moment, these voices had been haunting my mind for as long as I could remember. So long, I believed they were my own.  I broke, unable to live for another moment with their tortured screams inside of my head. I decided to do something different this time; to fight back with self love. To love myself in spite of the voices screaming it was impossible.  I found my own, long silenced voice and screamed back. Hearing my own true inner voice, I realized the other voices weren't mine at all. These demons had a different name... mom and dad.  Growing up, my house was a war zone. My parents were violent alcoholic scam artists. The marks from the physical abuse had long healed over, but the mental and emotional wounds were still open and bleeding. All those horrible things those voices screamed were just echos of all the things my parent's had screamed at me growing up. I had been replaying their abuse on a constant loop in my head, even let myself believe it was true.  It's funny how time, space and having children of your own can awaken a new perspective. Thinking about my own children, I became angry. Now my own inner voice was so loud it drowned out the imposters, calling them out on their lies. One by one I dragged them out of hiding and out of my head for good. In naming them and seeing them for who they were I was able to cast them out.  Like that, my mind was no longer haunted by the ghosts of my abusive childhood. The wounds in my mind no longer bleeding, I stand proudly outside of the cycle of abuse I was raised in. I still have a lot of healing to do but now the only voice in my head is my own.</p>
29	I survived a near-fatal car crash	<p><u>I survived a near-fatal car crash</u>  After my near fatal car crash, I got angel wings tattoo'd onto my back to remind me the angels have my back, because I came away with only minor injuries and everyone said it was a miracle I had SURVIVED. I had PTSD as a result of my accident, and reoccurring dreams of the scene of the accident. I would be above my car in the sky looking down at myself. In the dream 2 beings either side would take me back down to my body and I would wake up. I got back in the car after a few months and for 14 years I didn't even really curb a wheel, and then just before Christmas I had another accident. It did resurface my ptsd but I got through it! I survived again.</p>
30	I survived years of being told I wasn't good enough	<p><u>I survived years of being told I wasn't good enough</u></p>
31	I survived adultery	<p><u>I survived adultery</u>  The times you were told it was all in your head.  The times you thought you were going crazy.  The times you did things you never thought you'd do to try and get clarification.  That sick feeling you carried around.  Then... that moment you found the proof.</p>

		<p>The realisation that this is life changing.  Your trust shattered.  The devastation.  Shards of your heart laying on the floor.  Your life in tatters.  The feelings of not being enough.  How do you pick yourself up from that?  And still, I rise.</p>
32	I survived rape	<p><u>I survived rape</u>  6 years ago I was in a relationship with a man who regularly raped me. He made me feel like no one would ever love me and this was how my life would be forever. I haven't told many people this story because I felt so ashamed, he led me to believe that I brought this on myself and I deserved it, other people that I told couldn't understand how I got myself in that situation. I would get the affection and love that I needed just for it to be ripped away the next minute.  I'm learning to be happy with my body and to enjoy it. Sex can be really difficult sometimes but it's also really fun and I'm so glad I can enjoy it safely and happily. This opportunity is so exciting to see my body as beautiful and most importantly mine. It does get better.</p>
33	I survived a twisted bowel	<p><u>I survived a twisted bowel</u>  I am surviving my life. With love. With humour. With hunger for more.  In the early hours of 5 November 2017, I was woken by discomfort that became pain that quickly became agony. I was alone and managed to call an ambulance.  If I hadn't, I would have died.  It was a twisted bowel - caecal volvulus - which even with treatment has a less than thirty per cent chance of survival. I have seen the scan photos, and been told that they are dramatic and extreme.  I have an 8-inch scar running down my belly.  In hospital I reconnected with a newly single friend, with whom I have since had the best sex of my life. We were gentle with each other's scars, and hungry, and we each take pleasure in giving pleasure to the other. I still don't know what role, if any, my lover will play in the broader story of my life, but for now, things are good.  But I survived. And still I rise.</p>
34	I survived a motorbike accident that killed my 'ol man	<p><u>I survived a motorbike accident that killed my 'ol man</u>  In 2015, I was in a motorcycle accident, where my 'ol man lost his life and I have a series of scars. My rib cage ink is a memorial to him.  My world changed in a moment. On our way home from a great day ride we had our back tire blow out. My man did everything right but still the motorcycle flipped and we were thrown. As if in slow motion I stood up and went to him, lying in the road. I can still taste that copper taste in the remembering (&amp; tears do fall). I wear the road scars on the right side of my body. I remember the ICU and human kindness. I made death decisions and held his hand as he passed from my world. I do not speak of that pain. Until this project that pain was too much to put into words. Kat Shaw's amazing artwork holds that pain and allows me to remove it from time to time. This painting, my blue self, honours all that has passed while allowing me to rise all at the same time.</p>

35	I survive with PTSD	<u>I survive with PTSD</u>
36	I survived anal rape	<p><u>I survived Anal rape</u></p> <p>At 18, I met a man that I thought was a Greek god. He was, in fact, Greek and beautiful. My friends, his friends, he and I were hanging out together after an evening of clubbing. He and I went off to another room to be alone. I couldn't believe this handsome man would be interested in me. We were kissing and things were progressing very heatedly. I needed to put the brakes on. I had my period and I was also still a Virgin. I tried to stop him, but he didn't stop and flipped me over and anally raped me. I was screaming no, but no one came to help me. His friends started calling for him and he left.</p> <p>I was alone with my friend and told her what happened but I didn't go to the hospital or the police.</p> <p>I have shut this experience away and look at it as a lifetime ago. I survived almost silently, only sharing this story with a few people. Because there was a short skirt, alcohol and kissing, I knew this was the stuff used to blame the victim. I was screaming no, but a house full of people never came to help.</p>
37	I survived becoming a mother	<p><u>I survived becoming a mother</u></p> <p>A MEDITATION ON THE MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD</p> <p>If you had told 15 year old me that 32 year old me would be sitting on a stain covered couch, surrounded by a hurricane of toys while her two tiny roommates slept, I would have never believed you. I never thought motherhood was for me. I was going to live a life of adventure, never settling down. I planned to be the crazy aunt at Christmas with all the best stories. Motherhood, to me, felt like a chore and a burden.</p> <p>My sister was born shortly after my parents finalized their separation and just before my 6th birthday. As a single mom, my mother leaned heavily on me for help with my sister. At first just little things like feedings and diaper changes. Progressing to babysitting for her and her friend by the time I was 10.</p> <p>At that point, my mother had gotten serious with my stepfather and my half brother was born. By the time he started school all typical "mom" jobs were my responsibility. All the cooking, cleaning, homework, and childcare fell to me. I was 14.</p> <p>By 16 my parents were all but lost to alcoholism and addictions. They would disappear for days at a time with no word and only come back to get into violent altercations. Even when my parents were home, my siblings would come to me for everything. I developed severe care giver fatigue but no matter how much I begged for help from them, they wouldn't help or give me a break. Even when I tried to refuse or fight back, they would beat me into submission physically and verbally.</p> <p>I vowed then I would never have children and started making my escape plan. At the time, that was to get myself into university and get as far away from that house as I could.</p> <p>Life does have a funny way of not going according to plan though. In the summer before I was set to start my first year of University, I got violently ill. An ultrasound revealed the source to be a 24lbs cyst that had moved and damaged most of my internal organs and was likely to rupture, killing me, within no more than a month. The doctor was surprised it hadn't already.</p> <p>I went in for a routine ultrasound at 10am and was in emergency surgery at 10pm to remove the cyst and my ovary. Thankfully they were able to save the rest of my internal organs, but it took years for them to settle.</p> <p>In the span of a couple hours I went from a size 16 to a 6. I was essentially pregnant with twins my entire high school career. I had always been a bigger kid and my self-esteem was so low I didn't even realize something was wrong. More maddening is the knowledge that a pap test could have caught it much earlier, but I couldn't even get my parents to take me to the doctor when I was sick, let alone for preventative care.</p>

The aftermath of the cyst was huge. It left me with some pretty serious body dysmorphia intensified by years of verbal abuse. Now I was finally "pretty" by contemporary standards, but my body felt alien. I didn't know how to dress it. I didn't know how to deal with all this new attention I was now getting. I was also still in incredible pain as my body tried to put all its organs back where they belonged. It took years to tackle all of the complications around that cyst and get to a place where I felt healthy and whole. That would be right about the time I met the father of my children.

It was a whirlwind romance; we fell hard and fast. Despite my doctor's warnings that I likely wouldn't be able to get and stay pregnant without medical intervention, I found myself pregnant 2 months into our relationship. I was so terrified and sad when I found out. I was just starting to get my life together and wasn't ready for motherhood.

After a long talk, we decided that we would keep it and do it together. I found myself actually getting excited about the idea of having a baby. I was still scared, but also hopeful. I went down to visit him so we could celebrate together and start making plans.

That's when I started bleeding. We headed right for the hospital, but I knew before we even got there it wasn't good. They ran a couple tests and left us waiting for what felt like forever for the specialist to come and tell us what was going on.

The specialist arrived and launched right into surgery to remove the unviable pregnancy. No one had even told us that we had lost the baby. I couldn't hear anything he said after unviable. I kept asking him to slow down and repeat himself. That's when I learned I had a molar pregnancy, when an embryo gets an extra chromosome and turns into a tumour instead of a foetus. If left untreated, it can turn cancerous and kill you.

The doctor just got more and more frustrated with my questions and crying, trying to rush me into surgery right away. When I refused, he told me to "go home and bleed to death then."

I regret not demanding a new doctor, but I let the nurse talk me into coming back in the morning and letting the doctor perform the surgery then. After the surgery I would be closely monitored to make sure they removed it all. If they didn't, it could regrow. I also was not allowed to get pregnant for at least a year and was more likely to have it happen again.

I was an emotional wreck to say the least. I felt like I had wished away what might have been my only chance at having a child. I was also relieved because I was so terrified of becoming a mother; or more specifically my mother. The two opposing feelings locked in a war.

Thankfully, the surgery was successful, and the experience served to strengthen our relationship. We decided to keep moving forward with our plans to buy a house together.

A couple years go by, and now I'm feeling ready. Now I wanted to be a mother, more than anything. But try as we may, it wasn't happening. I drove myself near crazy trying to track my cycles; cried into so many negative pregnancy tests. All the guilt of my miscarriage and the years of swearing off motherhood swirled in my head. I felt like such a failure. All the trying nearly destroyed the relationship.

It wasn't until 2 years later, when we stopped trying that a miracle in the form of a little girl happened. From the moment it came back positive, fear took over. I spent the entire pregnancy terrified of miscarrying and hating myself; my new pregnant body especially.

All I could hear was my mother's own words echoing in my head. How getting pregnant with me ruined her body for life. How ugly and fat she is now thanks to me. How stretched and saggy. And how traumatic and terrible labour and my birth was for her.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you want to look at it, my daughter was a stubborn breach baby, so her birth was a scheduled c-section.

Going into the OR a weird, surreal calmness swept over me. The room had a light, electric feel as all the nurses and doctors prepared. Their jokes and calm presence made it easy to relax and prepare to meet my daughter.

She came into the world butt first and screaming. I'll never forget the joy and relief of hearing her first cry. I just wanted to hold her, but they made me wait until I got to the recovery room. Once she was cleaned up and checked out her dad brought her over for me to see. It didn't really hit me until I was alone with my daughter the first time in the hospital room that I was a mother now and forever. Although I felt love for her before she was even born, it didn't feel like enough. I didn't feel that immediate bond most mothers talk about. All those old fears and insecurities started creeping in. Here she was barely a couple of hours old, and I already felt like I was failing her as a mother. These feelings only intensified as I failed over and over again to get her to breast feed.

I tried and failed for days. She kept losing weight and was crying all the time. Her cries hurt more than anything. I just knew she was hungry, but I couldn't make my body do what it was supposed to do. On top of which, due to my flat nipples and my daughter's love of biting, it hurt like nothing else. I would rank it as the most physically painful experience I've had. Far worse than the csection recovery.

Yet any time I would ask for a bottle, I would get shamed by the nurses. "Just keep trying" they would tell me. "Breast is best!" Too drugged up and tired to fight, I kept trying against my better judgement. Until her father had enough of watching us both suffer and demanded a bottle of that dreaded "f" word; formula.

My girl sucked that bottle down so fast and finally (finally!) slept. The nurses still kept pressuring me to keep trying so I did, believing them when they said it would get easier.

It didn't. It only got worse. To the point that I dreaded feeding my child with every fibre of my being. I would have to mentally psyche myself up to even attempt it. The final straw was when my nipples were both entirely scabbed over. I just couldn't bring myself to put a scabby nipple in her mouth. So, I resigned myself to being a failure at breastfeeding and focused instead on being a good mom.

The first year flew by and before I knew it, I was pregnant again! We had discussed having more down the road but weren't looking to start again so soon. Life is so funny like that. Two years of trying then boom! Without even trying.

With my daughter born via c-section only the year prior and with my medical history, my son was also delivered via scheduled c-section by the same team of doctors in the same OR. Only this time I was able to hold him while they stitched me up. I'll never forget cuddling his tiny body to my chest with that shock of red hair in my face.

In recovery he latched like a dream and fed like a champ. I finally understood what all those women were talking about when they said breastfeeding was easy. My son was a natural. It didn't hurt and although I wasn't producing much milk, I was producing.

Unfortunately, my son was born allergic to breast milk. So, despite my best efforts, we still had to switch him to formula. That's when the postpartum depression really started taking hold.

I hated this new mom bod I had. I especially hated my saggy, stretch marked and scarred stomach that no amount of diet or exercise would ever fix. I felt all those things my mother described; ruined. Worthless.

That's when the postpartum depression got really bad. Twice I had failed to breastfeed or birth my children naturally. I threw myself entirely into caring for my children at the expense of my mental health. Thankfully my doctor was able to recognize the signs and helped me find treatment to get me through until my hormones levelled out and I could think clearly again.

It wasn't until I distanced myself from my own toxic mother and started to process my childhood trauma that I was able to really step into myself.

Contrary to the beliefs my mother tried to instil into me that motherhood destroys you, I found it empowered me. Through my children, I was able to view my own upbringing in a new light. Looking back at my childhood self, then my own daughter I became so angry. I couldn't and still can't understand how someone could do the things to their child my mother did to me.

		<p>Through that anger, I found the strength to cut my abusive mother out for good and find the space I needed to heal. In taking space, I realized I had been living my life in survival mode carrying around a brain filled with shrapnel. Slowly I began digging out all those old memories and processing them; going back to all those moments in time and offering my child-self the love I never received. I forgave her mistakes and missteps. In forgiveness I learned to love her and myself for the strength it took to preserve. It may have taken 31 years and two kids to get here, but I've finally learned to love myself. Now when I look at my body, I admire my curves and muscle tone and the softness of my skin. Looking at my scars I feel powerful; they remind me I am a warrior. I can finally see the Goddess that's been there the whole time. Hidden behind my fear and self-loathing.</p> <p>There's a quote I read recently that has stuck with me; "they broke the wrong parts of me. They broke my wings and forgot I had claws." Motherhood may have cost me my wings, but it sure sharpened my claws. I'll never be able to go back in time to change the past, but I will fight tooth nail and claw to make sure history doesn't repeat itself. I may not have come from a good family, but a good family will come from me.</p>
38	I survived an abusive marriage	<p><u>I survived an abusive marriage</u></p> <p>At 18 I was fully in love, thought I had found the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I have had M.E since I was 15 which has always made relationships difficult. But I'd found someone who loved me anyway. Who knew I was ill, and still wanted to be with me. He would tell me he'd always support me, whether I was relatively well, or significantly ill. He was proud of me, showing me off to all his friends whenever we went out and even missed the Spurs – Arsenal Derby to lay in a field looking at the stars with me. I was over the moon I'd found the kind of love people dreamed of, and at a young age.</p> <p>At 19 I found out my father had terminal cancer. It seemed a logical progression to get engaged. He proposed, and I was over the moon. I thought I had everything I'd ever wanted, but it wasn't long until crack started to appear. After appointments with the oncologist we found out my father didn't have much time, so we moved the wedding forward a year.</p> <p>As my father's health deteriorated so did our relationship. He started drinking more and was always looking for an argument. I put it down to the stress I had brought into his life. I started to dread the weekends, knowing he would be going to the pub. He would come home and continuously try to start an argument. He would shout and call me names, if I tried to leave he would block the doorway and force me into confrontation. One Thursday I had my first ever panic attack, caused simply by knowing the next day was Friday. Before I knew it, I was having frequent panic attacks leading up to the weekends. His behaviour towards me worsened, and suddenly I found myself sitting on my own doorstep at three o'clock in the morning waiting for him to fall asleep, so I could go back inside. The only way to escape the confrontation was to leave the house, but he would frequently try to stop me by blocking the way.</p> <p>I carried on blaming myself, saying that until I came into his life, he'd lived relatively stress free. That it was my fault he was stressed, and he just didn't know how to deal with it. That things would get better. I protected him, hiding his behaviour from my friends and family. Every time, the next morning he would apologise and tell me he loved me. He would say he knew he was in the wrong, that he didn't mean all the things he'd said the night before and that he was just struggling with all the feelings he had about my father dying. I believed him, before I came along he'd experienced few traumatic events. It was my fault he was struggling, so I accepted his apologies and started a new day.</p> <p>At our engagement party, I spent the majority of the night alone. I even got asked if I could take some guest's present to the table for the bride and groom. For the last dance, we had arranged for the song for our first dance at the wedding to play. The DJ announced it and called us both to the floor. Except it wasn't the dance I had imagined. It took two members of his family to get him to put down his beloved beer, so he could</p>

		<p>dance with me. I was humiliated. I felt so alone, the person I was supposed to share things with was more concerned with his drink than his wife to be.</p> <p>After this, I finally listened to my gut. I called off the engagement and made it public. But the backlash I received was enormous. I still wasn't honest about what had been going behind closed doors. Therefore, I blamed the behaviour at the engagement party. The behaviour as an isolated incident seemed out of proportion to calling off the wedding, so I was persuaded to go back. He promised he'd change, even offered to attend AA meetings. Though he made it clear how all his friends thought I was being ridiculous. He was just a young man having fun and I was trying to stop him.</p> <p>My dad died three months exactly before our wedding, but we had agreed that if it was three months or more, we would go ahead. In January 2013 I became estranged from my mum because of her coping methods with my dad's death. We moved into rented accommodation. Isolated and alone, things just got worse. Financially he controlled everything. If I wanted to socialise I had to do so with him and his friends. I saw less and less of mine. I would invite friends round, but soon that became a problem. It got to the point where I'd invite them over, and they would ask if he was out, or in a good mood. Looking back, I don't know how I didn't see it for what it was. Controlling and wrong.</p> <p>By October 2013 I had nowhere else to turn. I tried to end my own life. The one positive to come from this, was it formed the foundations on which I rebuild my relationship with my mum. I moved back to hers for a week after I was discharged to recuperate, but I still didn't disclose exactly what my marriage was like. Although my closest cousin had an indication of how he could be, no one knew the full extent. Somehow, I battled on. I was adamant I wouldn't fail as a wife. He worked so hard, so we had money as I couldn't work. After my suicide attempt I relapsed badly with my M.E and was bed bound inside and wheelchair bound outside. He'd tell me I didn't need a wheelchair and that I should think about getting a job as he paid for everything and I just took. This added to my lack of self-esteem and self-blame.</p> <p>I stopped feeling. I was beaten. I no longer had panic attacks as I didn't feel anything. I'd stopped crying myself to sleep and was just numb. I believed I just had to accept it and this was how things were. I suspected he'd cheated on me but didn't have anything left to care.</p> <p>November 2016, I woke up. That year I volunteered in a secondary school as a student mentor. It gave me a purpose and some confidence. I decided that this didn't have to be how things were and I deserved more. I moved back to my mums on the basis of a month's trial separation. After three days I knew I wasn't going back. It was as if the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders.</p> <p>But I still didn't talk about what I'd been through and how it had made me feel. In August 2016 I tried to end my own life again. This time I nearly lost my life to it. I understood that I couldn't just carry on as I had been. I started counselling to begin working through all the issues I faced. Now, I'm a long way down the road of recovery and I get stronger every day. I want readers to know that the most educated, strong and independent people can end up in an abusive relationship before they know how they got there. But it doesn't have to stay that way. Support is out there, and honesty is key. People that abuse you don't deserve your protection, and you deserve to be able to speak out if things aren't as they should be.</p>
39	I survived an unwanted and much regretted breast reduction	<p><u>I survived an unwanted and much regretted breast reduction</u></p> <p>I had a breast reduction in 2001 to appease my husband and his family and make myself smaller. I have always been curvy, even when I was much slimmer. I had an hourglass figure, but that just wasn't acceptable enough.</p> <p>The surgery rendered me unable to breastfeed my son and it all but destroyed me, leading to severe postnatal depression, and just a horrible time.</p> <p>I have since been able to reconcile what happened, and I forgive myself for the decision I made to mutilated my own precious body.</p> <p>I have yo-yo dieted, starved, taken pills and done all sorts of things to this body that I am not proud of.</p>

40	I survive debilitating migraines	<p><u>I survive debilitating migraines</u></p> <p>To all those who think that a migraine is just a bad headache. Think again. Migraines are evil. The sensitivity to light and noise. And smell. The vomiting. The loss of sight. The incapability to talk or remember words. The fact that even your hair hurts. The fact that you can only get through 1 minute at a time because the thought of anything more sends you over the edge. The feeling of an ice pick being repeatedly dug into your skull. The avoidance of your favourite food in case it triggers an attack. The constant awareness of impending weather as that may also trigger attack. Your temples being placed in a vice. The feeling of exploding from the inside due to the pressure inside your skull. Being freezing cold. Followed by the excruciating heat. The brain fog. Feeling too nauseous to lay down because of room spin, but your head is pounding way too much to be upright. Wanting to scoop your eyes out with a spoon because they hurt so much. White lines in your vision. Or blind spots. Or flickering lights. Blurry eyes that feel like they're full of sand. Falling over because your balance has gone. The neck stiffness and pain that accompanies the head agony. The fact that it even hurts to wear clothes. The tight jaw. The pulsating face. Loss of memory. The dread of a special occasions coming up in case a migraine strikes. Resulting in reluctance to commit to anything. Hitting your head repeatedly to try and make the pain stop. Crying, but then realising that that is just making it worse. The fact that sunglasses are a permanent feature on your face. The panic if you leave home without migraine medication. The anxiety of always presuming something worse must be going on in your head, because surely a migraine cannot be THIS bad. The furrowed brow that makes you look constantly angry, but is really a response to the pain. And then, when the actual headache part of it is over (usually about 4 days in my case), the shakes that last an extra few days. The stomach cramps as a result of the medication. The fear that at some point you're going to have to go through it again. The sadness because you have had to miss out due to not being able to leave a darkened room. The unexplainable anxiety that hangs around. BUT – with that comes the elation that you do not have a migraine anymore. Migraine is a neurological disease which cannot be seen on the surface. It IS NOT a bad headache. And, I survive.</p>
41	I survived an alcoholic father	<p><u>I survived an alcoholic father</u></p> <p>Once upon a time, a girl was born. She was quickly followed by one brother...and in a few years, another. When she was about 9, her grandfather introduced her to secret sexual activity. She was terrified and ashamed. When her grandfather died, she believed the monster was gone.</p> <p>Soon she was a budding teen and she began to act out. She had no idea why.</p> <p>When she had had her heart broken for the first time, she lost the feeling of being valuable. She'd given herself and been rejected. In her attempt to feel wanted again, she responded to the first "I love you" with kisses and freely given consent. It took one night only with that 16 year old boy, and the 15 year old girl was expecting. She didn't tell her parents until she was 6 months along, the baby's father and his family were against it and her co-dependent mother had been denied the time to intervene and "erase" her pregnancy before the secret was out. She thought the storms had calmed, but there were so many more to come. She left school and got her qualifications. Not an adult, but no longer a child.</p> <p>When she was of age, she met a man that she thought herself "in love" with. The truth was though, that this was sadly more evidence of that lost value. He had been the boyfriend of her dearest friend, and sadly she valued his pursuit of her more than she did the friendship. She saw a flash of that valuable feeling she'd lost long ago and betrayed her own heart to have him. They were soon married and a second child immediately followed. Her first son was only just turning 3.</p>

Recognition that ingredients without a recipe was a disaster, happened almost immediately. Infidelity, anger, verbal and physical abuse then divorce. Her daughter was not even 2. Time went on and her attempts to ease her pain ran the gamut. Sex, drugs, secret lives - leading to a 2nd marriage. A second divorce would follow as well. Then, another explosion. The biggest storm yet. The girl was grown and working 2 jobs to pay the bills. Her marriage had come after a suicide attempt, and she was held under threat of no commitment unless she agreed to counselling. She agreed and got the commitment, but in the state she was in, never saw that she was going home to a monster. Her mother rejected her, but took her children on so they wouldn't be homeless and the girl allowed her second husband to take her to live several hours away from everyone she knew.

Once she'd enrolled in school as he had also done, she was able to secure school housing and retrieved her kids. Her counselling abandoned, she had gone back to survival mode. Ups and downs filled their days and there were always problems and pain. Finally, she ran out of ways to juggle and followed him again. This time she added some chains around her own ankles; she switched financial responsibility for the apartment to herself so that his credits were available for transfer, making her a drop out who was "locked out" until the debt was paid. She never did get that "key".

She struggled and her mental state was unstable as the time passed. Her husband would not work. He did not keep the house or do repairs. He had eventually graduated, but claimed that depression and trauma kept him at home.

She turned to God. The hard loving Baptist God she had grown up hearing about.

She began to journal in the mornings. Began to see deeper truths. She began asking for the "truth" about her marriage.

When the truth came, it came like a bomb. He had been molesting her daughter since before she was in school. And her daughter was now 13.

Her daughter had told her school counsellor. Then her. The woman separated from him in the hope he would, of course, correct his bad behaviour and that they could move forward. But her daughter was terrified she would allow him to come back.

Her prayers had been heard and this was the "truth".

She was furious.... with him, with herself, with God.

Jumping backward a thousand paces and upping the ante on every bad response was the way it happened. She was dying. Sex again. Drugs again. Food. No coping skills. And so much pain. She ballooned to over 300lbs. At 38 years old, she'd been working at a job that had good benefits and so was able to have a gastric bypass. Her life exploded again. With all of her dreams of losing the weight coming true, and all of the realities of the wounds underneath exposed suddenly, she crumbled. Again.

Anxiety over a changing body and the devastation the weight left behind caused those old responses to flare. Soon she was madly in love and living a fantasy with yet another disaster waiting to happen. By the time she understood that she couldn't support another bird if her own wings were broken, she was drinking whiskey straight and blacking out almost nightly. That bird would soon kill himself. Another bomb exploding. This one in the dark. Late at night. A bullet left the gun, as she lay passed out next to him in her bed. She was woken with that flash, but he would never wake again.

She survived the shock, the alcohol haze not quite concealing the way her fingers dipped into the wound. She tried to bandage his head. She survived the search for the telephone. The panic, as she only found broken pieces of it. The drive to his brother's house, only a mile away, looking for help. She survived the sudden barking orders to call 911. She survived the crushing reality of what had happened when she was told he had shot himself. She survived the memory of stepping over the gun and wondering at it being there, never understanding its presence. She survived the realization that she had assumed the mess was from a fall he had taken, and instead the result of a drunken

		<p>dispute. She survived the police. The Catholic family and their grief. She survived the blame. She survived. But she did not do it perfectly. She dove into the bottle for years. He had died in 2005. By 2007, she'd managed to alienate everyone but the fringe dwellers. She'd stopped drinking for a bit, but attention from a biker was just the diversion she needed to escape and alcohol quickly set it on fire. She ended up in jail on a domestic violence charge. Homeless and without a car, she had alienated even the worst of the outlaws and had managed to inspire a biker to call the police on her and then her other to bail her out. She left jail with her mother, unknowingly headed to dysfunctional house arrest for a year. She survived that too. She managed to quit drinking and attended a support group and that helped. She was awarded disability for severe depression, anxiety, and ptsd. She found a little house to put her money towards that she could afford to live in. She rebuilt relationships with her kids and was able to be joyfully involved with her grands. The coming years would be spent creating a life that felt good. She would rekindle a romance and fall in love again. A life with art and creative expression. A life with spirituality. A bigger picture of who God might be. A life learning to love herself.</p> <p>I am that girl. Now, with so many grands and so many more years survived. I am now living my true happily ever after in creating a love story with myself and the beautiful life I am building as I go. I survived.</p>
42	I survived molestation aged 12	<p><u>I survived molestation aged 12</u></p>
43	I survived financial abuse	<p><u>I survived financial abuse</u></p> <p>My ex-partner and father to my child abused me physically, psychologically, sexually and financially. I suffered the abuse throughout my pregnancy to the extent that I could have lost my unborn child at the time because of the physical abuse.</p> <p>The abuse didn't stop until I decided to say no more, I made this decision when my daughter was only a couple of months old in 2015.</p> <p>The abuse didn't end there though... he continued to attempt to contact me, harassed my friends, my family, made fake social media accounts and turned people I thought were friends against me.</p> <p>It's not the physical harm that hurts me the most it's the psychology impact that doesn't go away, flashbacks, triggers (music, sounds, smells) PTSD and anxiety.</p> <p>I did everything to try and get justice, police reports, legal action, children services, doctor appointments and contacted support organisations. Unfortunately, I was failed by the system... but in 2019 I was made to go to court over child contact. I'll be honest this felt like the worst time of my life. I had no choice but to have to face my abuser again. During this time though, I truly took my power back and I was being heard. I decided to stand up for myself, I told my story to people I didn't want to. I faced him on several occasions and stood tall showing no weakness. Domestic abuse was taken seriously, finally I was believed.</p> <p>One thing I'm certain about is, I will never give up. I will keep being the goddess that I am. I will keep fighting for justice and standing up for what I believe in. I will keep doing this not only for myself and my family but for all the wonderful people who are survivor's and for the future generation.</p> <p>We deserve to live in peace and happiness, we are strong warrior's and nothing can and will stop us surviving.</p> <p>And still, I rise!</p>
44	I am surviving heartbreak	<p><u>I am surviving heartbreak</u></p> <p>At the start of this year my husband, who I have been in a relationship with for 10 years (and love deeply), told me he wants to separate. That he feels we have both changed too much and no longer make each other happy.</p>

		<p>Although last year it did feel we were drifting apart, I didn't ever expect for this to happen. We were soul mates and I can't believe we are parting ways. I am absolutely heartbroken. My mind playing things over "was I too much, was I not enough?!"</p> <p>I did allow myself to feel powerless to begin with as the decision to separate wasn't mine, but I am reclaiming my power.</p> <p>I will get through it; I am surviving it. And have incredible friends and family supporting me.</p> <p>So, here is me, stripped bare. In all my too muchness...I am enough.</p>
45	I survived self harming	<p><u>I survived self-harming</u></p> <p>REFLECTIONS ON MY SCARS</p> <p>I bear no visible scars from the physical and mental abuse from my childhood; save the self inflicted ones. Now streaks of silver on my otherwise porcelain skin they serve as a reminder of the warrior I am. Of the unseen battles I waged, fought and won for control of my own mind.</p> <p>At 13 I tried to take my own life. I've been suicidal since, but this was different. I didn't just want the pain to end, I truly wanted to exist no longer. I was tormented at home and at school and felt like death was my only means of escape. I stole a bottle of pills from the medicine cabinet, downed its contents and went to bed ready to meet God.</p> <p>Instead, I dreamt of the Goddess. She held me close and apologized for all the pain this world had caused me. She asked me to find the hope and strength to keep living and keep fighting.</p> <p>I wish I could say when I woke up, things got better. They didn't. No longer afraid of death and unable to imagine a more miserable existence I started to fight back. The harder I fought, the worse they beat me down.</p> <p>That's when I began to self harm. I explored a number of methods before settling on a blade from a razor I broke apart. In those intense moments when I felt completely out of control, the pain would bring me back to my centre. The sight of myself bleeding became the only way I felt alive. I started doing drugs, drinking, and engaging in all kinds of risky behaviour; daring Death to come back for me, still desperate for an escape.</p> <p>At my peak, I carried a razor with me everywhere I went. It was a whole other drug, the power and control over my own pain. I would routinely sneak into the bathroom to cut myself at school and then all night at home. I started running out of places to cut that I could keep hidden. I never went anywhere without being full covered in baggy clothes. As much as I loved the thrill of cutting, I also hated the scars they left behind and hated myself for doing it. It was a vicious cycle of pain and self-hatred that had reached a frenzied pitch.</p> <p>It was after one especially bad night I realized I needed to find other ways to manage my pain. My stepdad and I had our worst fight I can remember. After beating me and tossing me outside with no shoes, I walked from our farm house towards the neighbours, about a block away. I was half way down the road when I heard the truck start and a bolt of fear shot through me. I was absolutely certain he was coming to kill me. I took off into the farmer's field and ran for my life. He screeched to a halt on the road, jumped out and started chasing me down. I screamed at the top of my lungs over and over for help, but no one could hear me. He started screaming back to shut up and come back to him this instant, his voice wild with rage. It just made me run harder, despite the burning in my chest and the pain in my feet.</p> <p>Thankfully I made it to the neighbours before he could catch up to me. I call my uncle to pick me up but before he could my mother arrived and forced me to come back to the house. I spend the rest of the night being verbally abused by both of my parents and locked in my room. I chugged the bottle of rum I had stashed and busted out my razor blade. Drunk and unable to cope I cut myself like I never had before; as deep as I could bury the blade.</p>

		<p>By the time I regained control my room looked like a horror movie. There was so much blood everywhere. I started to panic and realized I was out of control. I needed to stop hurting myself and find better ways to cope with my pain.</p> <p>Unfortunately, self-harm was my drug of choice and coming down wasn't easy. It took moving out of my parents' house and starting therapy for me to stop completely. Admittedly I still get the urge sometimes when I'm struggling, but it's far easier to ignore.</p> <p>Even after I stopped and the scars had mostly faded I struggled with the aftermath. It wasn't until into my 20s I felt confident enough to wear a short sleeve shirt in public. I hated more than anything people calling attention to my scars, though watching them pass silent judgement on me when they noticed them was a close second.</p> <p>It's been more than a decade now since the last time I acted on the urge to harm myself. The urges are still there but I've mostly overwritten them now with exercise, meditation, and journalling. I've forgiven my former self for leaving these reminders for me, and promise to never forget how hard she fought to get me here.</p> <p>Gone, too, is the self-hatred. Now when I look at my scars I see my strength; I see my inner Warrior Goddess in all her glory. I've survived my darkest nights, died a thousand deaths, yet here I am; covered in battle wounds but very much alive. Secure in the knowledge that no matter how many times life burns me, I will always rise from the ashes a bigger, badder and wiser. No longer just surviving, now I'm thriving.</p>
46	I am surviving chronic illness	<p><u>I am surviving chronic illness</u></p> <p>My back story with chronic illness is that I was diagnosed with hypermobile ehlers-danlos syndrome at the beginning of last year, I had been in pain for about two years prior to this. HEds means I have faulty collagen so my joints are unstable and dislocate easily, I also get tired really easily. Some days I'm fine and some days I can be in a lot of pain. I do a lot of exercises to help strengthen the muscles around my joints so they are not so unstable but it's an ongoing battle.</p>
47	I survived a prolapse	<p><u>I survived a prolapse</u></p> <p>I am surviving my life. With love. With humour. With hunger for more.</p> <p>I got pregnant easily, twice, and had two empowering births. But my son was too eager to get out into the world and a speedy labour without medical staff took its toll, and prolapse followed. I was unable to laugh, jump, sneeze, dance without being reminded of it, and it was too long before I sought help. A hysterectomy and six other surgeries followed, with eventual success, but the repairs are unlikely to last the rest of my life. I will not be held back again.</p> <p>But I survived. And still I rise.</p>
48	I survived a dermoid ovarian cyst	<p><u>I survived a dermoid ovarian cyst</u></p> <p>The pain in my lower abdomen kept me back &amp; forth to the doctors for quite a few months. First of all it was just my monthly cycle, then it was psychosomatic but eventually an ovarian dermoid cyst was found the size of a tennis ball! It had teeth &amp; hair! I came through surgery with a huge scar &amp; early menopause, but I survived!</p>
49	I survived major surgery that disfigured me	<p><u>I survived major surgery that disfigured me</u></p> <p>One thing that has had a huge impact on how I feel about my body is the major surgery that disfigured me. My hips are very unsymmetrical &amp; I have one leg longer than the other &amp; it's been a very hard journey to love &amp; accept my body the way it is, especially when looking at myself naked.</p>
50	I survived chemotherapy,	<p><u>I survived chemotherapy, radiation and surgery</u></p> <p>I'm not sure how others experience chemotherapy, radiation and/or surgery. My experience of them was hurt. Chemotherapy for me, was needles stuck in my veins, scary four bags of medicine that took all day to drip into my body, collapsed veins, the sickness that followed, the</p>

	radiation and surgery	every two week cycle for seven months, being bald -- all hurt. Radiation for me was a scary machine, cut metal plates sliding in and out of the machine with people hiding behind cement walls while zapping my naked body, skin burning and peeling off over two months, creams and isolation -- all hurt. Surgery for me was weird suits, false bravery, terrifying rooms, weird smells, scary sounds, masked humans, needles, knives, staples, stiches, bandages, drugs, violation, horrific pain, scars and recovery -- all hurt. This project honors that hurt and frees me from it. I look at my painting and see ME. And, still I rise!
51	I survived trauma therapy	<u>I survived trauma therapy</u>
52	I survived alcoholism	<p><u>I survived alcoholism</u></p> <p>Once upon a time, a girl was born. She was quickly followed by one brother...and in a few years, another. When she was about 9, her grandfather introduced her to secret sexual activity. She was terrified and ashamed. When her grandfather died, she believed the monster was gone.</p> <p>Soon she was a budding teen and she began to act out. She had no idea why.</p> <p>When she had had her heart broken for the first time, she lost the feeling of being valuable. She'd given herself and been rejected. In her attempt to feel wanted again, she responded to the first "I love you" with kisses and freely given consent. It took one night only with that 16 year old boy, and the 15 year old girl was expecting. She didn't tell her parents until she was 6 months along, the baby's father and his family were against it and her co-dependent mother had been denied the time to intervene and "erase" her pregnancy before the secret was out. She thought the storms had calmed, but there were so many more to come. She left school and got her qualifications. Not an adult, but no longer a child.</p> <p>When she was of age, she met a man that she thought herself "in love" with. The truth was though, that this was sadly more evidence of that lost value. He had been the boyfriend of her dearest friend, and sadly she valued his pursuit of her more than she did the friendship. She saw a flash of that valuable feeling she'd lost long ago and betrayed her own heart to have him. They were soon married and a second child immediately followed. Her first son was only just turning 3.</p> <p>Recognition that ingredients without a recipe was a disaster, happened almost immediately. Infidelity, anger, verbal and physical abuse then divorce. Her daughter was not even 2. Time went on and her attempts to ease her pain ran the gamut. Sex, drugs, secret lives - leading to a 2nd marriage. A second divorce would follow as well. Then, another explosion. The biggest storm yet. The girl was grown and working 2 jobs to pay the bills. Her marriage had come after a suicide attempt, and she was held under threat of no commitment unless she agreed to counselling. She agreed and got the commitment, but in the state she was in, never saw that she was going home to a monster. Her mother rejected her, but took her children on so they wouldn't be homeless and the girl allowed her second husband to take her to live several hours away from everyone she knew.</p> <p>Once she'd enrolled in school as he had also done, she was able to secure school housing and retrieved her kids. Her counselling abandoned, she had gone back to survival mode. Ups and downs filled their days and there were always problems and pain. Finally, she ran out of ways to juggle and followed him again. This time she added some chains around her own ankles; she switched financial responsibility for the apartment to herself so that his credits were available for transfer, making her a drop out who was "locked out" until the debt was paid. She never did get that "key".</p>

She struggled and her mental state was unstable as the time passed. Her husband would not work. He did not keep the house or do repairs. He had eventually graduated, but claimed that depression and trauma kept him at home.

She turned to God. The hard loving Baptist God she had grown up hearing about.

She began to journal in the mornings. Began to see deeper truths. She began asking for the "truth" about her marriage.

When the truth came, it came like a bomb. He had been molesting her daughter since before she was in school. And her daughter was now 13.

Her daughter had told her school counsellor. Then her. The woman separated from him in the hope he would, of course, correct his bad behaviour and that they could move forward. But her daughter was terrified she would allow him to come back.

Her prayers had been heard and this was the "truth".

She was furious.... with him, with herself, with God.

Jumping backward a thousand paces and upping the ante on every bad response was the way it happened. She was dying. Sex again. Drugs again. Food. No coping skills. And so much pain. She ballooned to over 300lbs. At 38 years old, she'd been working at a job that had good benefits and so was able to have a gastric bypass. Her life exploded again. With all of her dreams of losing the weight coming true, and all of the realities of the wounds underneath exposed suddenly, she crumbled. Again.

Anxiety over a changing body and the devastation the weight left behind caused those old responses to flare. Soon she was madly in love and living a fantasy with yet another disaster waiting to happen. By the time she understood that she couldn't support another bird if her own wings were broken, she was drinking whiskey straight and blacking out almost nightly. That bird would soon kill himself. Another bomb exploding. This one in the dark. Late at night. A bullet left the gun, as she lay passed out next to him in her bed. She was woken with that flash, but he would never wake again.

She survived the shock, the alcohol haze not quite concealing the way her fingers dipped into the wound. She tried to bandage his head. She survived the search for the telephone. The panic, as she only found broken pieces of it. The drive to his brother's house, only a mile away, looking for help. She survived the sudden barking orders to call 911. She survived the crushing reality of what had happened when she was told he had shot himself. She survived the memory of stepping over the gun and wondering at it being there, never understanding its presence. She survived the realization that she had assumed the mess was from a fall he had taken, and instead the result of a drunken dispute. She survived the police. The Catholic family and their grief. She survived the blame. She survived. But she did not do it perfectly.

She dove into the bottle for years. He had died in 2005. By 2007, she'd managed to alienate everyone but the fringe dwellers. She'd stopped drinking for a bit, but attention from a biker was just the diversion she needed to escape and alcohol quickly set it on fire. She ended up in jail on a domestic violence charge. Homeless and without a car, she had alienated even the worst of the outlaws and had managed to inspire a biker to call the police on her and then her other to bail her out. She left jail with her mother, unknowingly headed to dysfunctional house arrest for a year. She survived that too. She managed to quit drinking and attended a support group and that helped. She was awarded disability for severe depression, anxiety, and ptsd. She found a little house to put her money towards that she could afford to live in. She rebuilt relationships with her kids and was able to be joyfully involved with her grands. The coming years would be spent creating a life that felt good. She would rekindle a romance and fall in love again. A life with art and creative expression. A life with spirituality. A bigger picture of who God might be. A life learning to love herself.

I am that girl. Now, with so many grands and so many more years survived. I am now living my true happily ever after in creating a love story with myself and the beautiful life I am building as I go. I survived.

53	I survived watching my daughter be diagnosed with a life threatening disease	<u>I survived watching my daughter be diagnosed with a life threatening disease</u>
54	I survive my self harm thoughts	<p><u>I survive my self harm thoughts</u></p> <p>I've been in the deepest darkest holes I can imagine. And I survive with self-harm thoughts. A lot of it is due to my health issues. won't bore you with my long exhausting diagnosis journey, but after 2 years of symptoms, more blood tests than I can count, and months of anger, resentment and sadness I finally received the diagnosis of M.E at 16 years old. For those that don't know M.E is described as a long-term (chronic), fluctuating, neurological condition that causes symptoms affecting many body systems, more commonly the nervous and immune systems. People with M.E. experience debilitating pain, fatigue and a range of other symptoms associated with post-exertional malaise, the body and brain's inability to recover after expending even small amounts of energy.</p> <p>At 16 years old this is pretty earth shattering. The first to arrive at parties and the first to leave (usually before most have even arrived). Disrupted academically, disbelieved, told your lazy or you don't look sick. Having a chronic illness is hard, having an invisible chronic illness is even harder. Not only do your peers, friends and family not believe you, nor do health professionals. I was incredibly lucky that I had a GP who did believe. In fact he diagnosed me before M.E was even recognised as a physical illness - all in your head.</p> <p>I missed out on a lot, school, uni, sports, exercise, social gatherings just to name a few. But I also learnt patience, understanding and forgiveness. I learnt that kindness is the world's most powerful weapon, and in the face of disbelief, harsh words or judgement, the best response was focused on education. If that didn't work, the second best response was letting go. I let go of loss of experiences, I let go of anger, I let go of resentment and I let go of expectations. I don't think I had truly internalised those lessons as a teen. But by 27 years old (now), I'm often praised for my ability to walk away from hurtful experiences and let things go. I'm beginning to understand that maybe it's actually my M.E I have to thank for that.</p> <p>During one of the toughest periods of my life I changed my phone background to the prayer "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  Courage to change the things I can,  And wisdom to know the difference.". Seeing this every hour of every day for a year left the impression of this attitude on me forever.</p> <p>Currently my M.E is under good management, I found a range of supplements which gave me my life back so with an average of 9-10 hours sleep a night I live a relatively normal life. But I wasn't always that lucky. At a time, I was bed bound, on 28 pills a day, in extreme pain and with relentless fatigue.</p> <p>I have new challenges ahead, with a possible diagnosis of Erythromelalgia (another obscure, misunderstood autoimmune illness, ironically shortened to E.M the reverse of M.E) but I'll take it in my stride. I have developed the serenity to accept the things I can't change and the wisdom to know what I can. Some days just brushing my teeth, washing my hair or carrying a load of washing upstairs is a battle. But I do and will survive chronic illness. I will give myself the best quality of life possible. I will laugh, I will learn and I will love. None of this would be possible without my parents, and my life would be a lot more dull without my best friend and her boyfriend, and the dilly dilly they bring.</p>

		<p>When I was bedbound I had times where I thought that was the rest of my life. Where I lost hope. But you can't lose hope. A saying I'm quite well known for is "things always have the irrefutable possibility of getting better". Don't rob yourself of that chance because you owe it to yourself. My dad taught me that we get the hand of cards we're dealt. That, is down to luck, but what you make of it is down to you. I've been in the deepest darkest holes I can imagine, but I've also climbed out of those holes repeatedly and every day strive to make life better for myself, but for others too. One of life's greatest lessons: in a world when you can be anything, be kind, because everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about (okay 2 greatest lessons).</p>
55	I survived the death of my child	<p><u>I survived the death of my child</u>  My 12-year-old and youngest son died suddenly and unexpectedly from an asthma attack. I wasn't with him when it happened. Losing a child is the worst of all losses. The biggest of scars. These scars run everywhere, inside and out. Invisible, never healing, they live, like my love, in every cell of my being. The pain never lessens you just get used to managing it. I not only lost my child but his future. I lost parts of my other children as they also broke from losing their brother. I lost the me that I knew.  Surviving the death of my child, learning to manage my grief and face life again took a long, long time. It was a journey into a madness of sorts. I was so broken that it took years to gather up the pieces of me and glue them together again, forever changed and more fragile. Yet with survival a new perspective on life came. This has been a gift. I see what's really important more clearly now and don't stress so much over the small stuff. I support other bereaved parents to help them to try and survive. This in turn supports me. I now carry my son with me, nestled safely inside my heart and soul wherever I go and whatever I do. Bereaved parents can learn to survive but we never stop grieving. Our grief is simply what our love looks like after loss and I'll never stop loving my child"</p>
56	I survive with OCD	<p><u>I survive OCD</u>  Living with OCD is like living with a brain that feels like its stuck in the same cycle over and over again. And there is no off switch. Repetition creates safety. Safety creates a fleeting second of calm. Before it all starts again. The world feels like it may end if certain things aren't done. And living with obsessive thoughts can drive you to such distraction that the real world cannot be distinguished from your compulsive world. For some, it is more severe. For me, my compulsion to have everything done and finished is a daily battle of rushing to the finish line, unable to breathe throughout, and often never attained anyway. Sleeplessness if the list isn't finished, not being able to focus on conversations as my brain is so full. Spotting something is out of place and it becoming the only thing I can possibly think about. The drive to have order. The to-do list that doesn't need to be done immediately, but my brain doesn't understand that there is a 6 week timeframe, it needs to be done, and that is that. The million miles an hour thoughts. The never switching off. Always overwhelmed. I survive the best I can with my coping mechanisms and my funny little ways.</p>
57	I survived being made to feel worthless	<p><u>I survived being made to feel worthless</u>  I was in an abusive relationship with a man who made me feel like no one would ever love me and this was how my life would be forever. I felt so ashamed, he led me to believe that I brought this on myself and I deserved it.</p>
58	I survived losing my lung, thyroid, uterus, spleen, cervix and	<p><u>I survived losing my lung, thyroid, uterus, spleen, cervix and kidney to cancer</u>  I am 54 years young. My first cancer experience was in 2004 where I underwent surgery (4 scars), chemotherapy and radiation. I lost my lung. I added in some ink to mark the occasion. My first relapse was in 2007. My cancer returned and I underwent surgery (1 scar). I lost my thyroid. I also added a bit of ink. My second relapse was in 2014. My cancer returned and I underwent surgery (1 scar). I lost my uterus and cervix. And, more ink. My third relapse was in 2016. My cancer returned and I underwent surgery (1 big belly scar). I lost my spleen and</p>

	kidney to cancer	<p>kidney. And, added more ink. I am mentioning the ink because no one would know about the amount of tattoos I have when looking at me out in the world.</p> <p>My ink work tells my story (not my cancer story, but my life story). I believe my scars to be my badges of honour. I wear them proudly, but in a silent way.</p> <p>Before this project, I told myself that cancer robbed me as a person. It robbed my ability to trust in my own body – which was trying to kill me. It robbed my peace. It scarred me. It stole my internal organs. Each reoccurrence was soul breaking.</p> <p>This project gave me back myself.</p> <p>It is bigger than “fuck cancer”.</p> <p>As I see my glorious paintings I do not see anything but stunning colour and power over my story.</p> <p>And still, I rise.</p>
59	I survived addiction	<p><u>I survived addiction</u></p> <p>Actually – that should be “I survive with addiction”. There isn’t a day goes by that I am not battling.</p>
60	I survived my daughter being chronically ill	<p><u>I survived my daughter being chronically ill</u></p> <p>There are few things worse that watching your child in pain. Screaming out in agony and fear. Life stopping. Ambulances. Prolonged stays in hospital. The sheer terror. The unknown. The face of your child pleading for you to do something. Yet, there is nothing you can do. Helpless. Praying for a split second of her life to be pain free. Praying for her recovery. Watching her determination to heal. The realisation that life will never be the same again. And then it happens again. Another relapse. This time worse. The prolonged recovery. Again. The anguish and fear. Again. Living on red alert. Always. Reliving the situation over and over in your head. Never relaxing. Never taking your eye off the ball for a second in case disaster strikes again. The darkest moments ever in the still of night. Watching them sleep. Listening for their breathing. Keeping your eyes open to stop the nightmares. Being alone. Fearing for the future. It leaves a mark on you. PTSD. It is never forgotten. Always lurking like the most unwanted guest. You cannot take the pain away. You just live with the sheer terror that the person you love more than anything in the world may feel that agony again. The flashbacks. Your life changed forever. But, still, we both survive. Us. Our team of 2.</p>
61	I survived a physically abusive relationship	<p><u>I survived a physically abusive relationship</u></p> <p>My first relationship, first love. My partner was physically abusive. And I’ve always bottled that up, and somehow wanted to bury it. I think I felt shame around it. I still now, 15 years on have dreams about it. And I feel it’s time for it to come out of the shadows!!!</p>
62	I am a long term survivor of HIV	<p><u>I am a long term survivor of HIV</u></p> <p>I’ve been diagnosed HIV for 25 years which makes me what they grandly call a long term survivor! I survived when many of my friends and my partner died....so I have and continue to survive multiple bereavements. Being diagnosed radically changed my relationship with my body, it’s taken years for me to regain a sense of being sexy or desirable. I survived feeling excluded from the church when the message in the early days of HIV said ‘AIDS is a punishment from God’.</p> <p>I was diagnosed with HIV 26 years ago and many of the other positive women who were around then are dead now, and today it hit me all over again and I wept and mourned them a fresh. My hair is an important symbol of my survival – I lived long enough for it to go grey/silver!!! Tomorrow is something I never take for granted these days, I’m just glad, grateful and if I’m honest slightly surprised, when it shows up as today!</p>

		<p>I lived into more tomorrows than I could ever have dreamt of - turning 50 was one I never thought I'd see, particularly as months before I was dying of pneumonia, which technically gave me an AIDS diagnosis... and amazingly I survived that too. There was a winters night when I collapsed on the bathroom floor and I could feel the life force ebbing out of me, I lay there in the freezing cold of February and thought 'this is it' – it was the most peaceful feeling I've ever had – survival is not an easy thing – it takes more courage, strength and tenacity than most of us believe we have, but it's there inside of us nevertheless, and as I lay there, my next thought was that it was likely that my daughter would be the one to find me and I couldn't bear the thought of her finding me on the bathroom floor, so I crawled back to bed and honestly believed when I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep that would be it....but here I still am!</p> <p>I guess at best survival is like a kaleidoscope, coloured fragments of our experience that make different patterns across our lives on different days, as the wheel of time turns ever onwards.</p>
63	I survived childhood and adult sexual abuse	<p><u>I survived childhood and adult sexual abuse</u></p> <p>Being abused as a child and later as an adult, created scars that have stayed with me through my life. The boundaries that create trust and safety were broken when I was a little girl and this affected who I was as a child, how I behaved as a teenager and the relationships I sought out as a young woman. The scars came in the way of shame, guilt, self-blame and self-hatred. I was a 'victim' and therefore open to more victimisation as I grew up. As a young adult my relationships were often damaging. I had no understanding of boundaries because they'd been shattered and so I didn't know how to keep myself safe. I was then sexually assaulted by my doctor. He later went to prison and despite being a strong witness the shame, his shame, was something that I still seemed to carry.</p> <p>Yet, a part of me, the survivor in me sought help as I got older. Aren't we women amazing what they go through and how we find the strength to go on! I worked on myself, talk it through with professionals, spent a long time in very difficult and painful emotional places working out who the shame, guilt and blame belonged to until I knew it wasn't me. I learnt how to take care of that inner child and that young woman who was hurt over and over. Now and for many years as a survivor I help other abused women to put the blame where it belongs. I am constantly overwhelmed and in awe of their strength and courage to face their monsters and battle their way through the traumas they've experienced. It's a privilege to see women move from victim to survivor and I feel grateful to those that supported me on that journey too.</p>
64	I survived an emotionally abusive relationship	<p><u>I survived an emotionally abusive relationship</u></p> <p>It started slowly, almost unrecognizable at the beginning, but then the control increased, the self-doubt crept in, the separation from family &amp; friends. He told me it was my fault &amp; my self-esteem was so low, I believed him. Then one day something snapped! I literally put my kids in the car &amp; ran whilst he was out! I didn't look back &amp; I survived!</p>
65	I survived a splenectomy	<p><u>I survived a splenectomy</u></p> <p>That small scar on my left side is from a splenectomy. I had to have my spleen removed in 2001 due to a growth on there that to this day remains a mystery.</p> <p>It's no mystery at all, it's all the anguish I endured from a traumatic childhood, coupled with the feelings of never being good enough. I am good enough. I stand here completely naked, without a care in the world.</p>
66	I survive with Ehlers Danlos syndrome	<p><u>I survive with Ehlers Danlos syndrome</u></p> <p>Ehlers-Danlos syndrome is a group of disorders that affect connective tissues supporting the skin, bones, blood vessels, and many other organs and tissues. Defects in connective tissues cause the signs and symptoms of these conditions, which range from mildly loose joints to life-threatening complications. I survive every day, even though I may be in pain – sometimes mild, sometimes chronic. I survive knowing there are limitations on my body. Having to limit activities. I survive knowing that I lack collagen and that my connective tissue does funky stuff. I</p>

		survive knowing I have passed this genetic condition to my daughter. And that I have to watch her survive. I survive the constant hospital appointments and monitoring. I survive the fear and the worry. I survive the tiredness. I survive having to always think in advance. I survive.
67	I survived the patriarchy	<p><u>I survived the patriarchy</u></p> <p>I have survived and am still surviving and trying to rid myself of the patriarchal restrictions and demands on women. Little did I know that for most of my life I was following rules that I had not made, which demanded me to be slim, pretty, demure and good at cooking. A real woman, who worshipped God and was an oppressed, lesser model to my male counterpart. Fuck that. The time has come to break free of society's patriarchal restraints. The time has come to live in my own world, taking ownership of my femininity and being as fierce or as submissive as I choose to be. I now step up and take up the place within this existence that Goddess intended me to.</p>
68	I survive with ME	<p><u>I survive with ME</u></p> <p>I was diagnosed with ME when I was 23 - what was a chest infection resulted in an autoimmune response affecting my thyroid. I had symptoms including fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, dizziness, pins and needles to name a few. I went from being a skinny gym bunny socialite to a routine of work, sleep, repeat. I was reassured numerous times that once my thyroid levels were normal, I would return to my usual bubbly self. I continued to hope. Once the day came where my blood results were normal, my hope began to fade. I was in a serious relationship with a wedding booked and a professional career which was jeopardised by the number of sick days I had to take. Just before my wedding, I was diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis - ME for short. I was determined that I would continue to live and prove that this is a neurological illness and not "yuppie flu" or "all in the mind". I count myself as a 'lucky one' - I have a career, a happy marriage and a beautiful child that I am more than grateful for. I still have all of those original symptoms- and some, weight gain being my biggest bug bear because I can't exercise much. I have to pace myself and plan my days - I have times where I can't get out of bed and struggle up the stairs. I have to make choices - take a walk or fold the laundry or have a shower. My 8-year-old understands that mummy can't always do what other mummies do and has to help more than the average child at home!</p>
69	I survived a collapsed lung	<u>I survived a collapsed lung</u>
70	I survive with alopecia	<p><u>I survive with alopecia</u></p> <p>I've been undecided on how to write this story of how I battle daily with my health robbing me of many aspects that are typically part of our society's definition of 'beauty'. Namely losing my eyelashes, eyebrows, and now my hair. When I first started losing my eyelashes on my left eye, I didn't think much of it. I'm not the kind of person who wears make up on an everyday, or even weekly or monthly basis. Whilst it was annoying, and I ended up with crap irritating my eye more regularly that was about the amount of thought I paid it. When I started losing my right eyebrow, I still didn't really connect the dots. Having an autoimmune chronic health condition means that health wise things often happen that don't have easy explanations, so I tend to pay them little attention. After a few months I had zero eyelashes and zero eyebrow left on my opposite features.</p> <p>I have to say after a month or two of no eyebrow it started to frustrate me. I'd tried growth serum to no avail and realised it was annoying me when I saw myself in photos. The lack of definition made my already rather round face seem even rounder. About 8 months later, I started to lose the other opposite corresponding eyelashes and eyebrows. Whilst it didn't impact me anywhere near as much as I imagine it would other women, it did play in the back of my mind. I found myself adding digitally fake eyebrows and eyelashes on my photos before I would post them on social media.</p>

		<p>In January 2020 I made the important decision to have my eyebrows microbladed. Whilst I cannot control that they've fallen out, there are steps I can take to bring them back (although artificially).</p> <p>Sometimes life throws you curveballs which are, for the most part, out of your control. I can't do anything about my health conditions except managing them to the best of my ability. Stressing about my hair will only make it worse.</p>
71	I survived severe anxiety disorder	<p><u>I survived Severe Anxiety Disorder.</u></p> <p>Have you ever had that feeling that the world is about to end? You know the one where you are getting to the top of the roller coaster, your stomach is in knots and you have no idea if you will survive. Imagine living in that heightened state of anxiety consistently and having to endure it for 24 hours. That's 1440 minutes of feeling unsafe. 86400 seconds of feeling that something dreadful is going to happen. Not only is it an awful way to live, but the knock-on effect into every part of your life is unbelievable. Work suffers. Social life suffers. Relationships suffer. To be honest, they are generally non-existent, as people simply do not understand how it feels to be constantly on red alert. How doing the smallest and seemingly simplest thing can trigger sheer terror. And tiredness is a constant companion as so much energy is spent on thinking the worst. Yet, sleep is scarce as your brain is overflowing with potential disasters. Life becomes easier when you have coping strategies, but to be honest, life is easier when you shut yourself away in your home where you are safe. And for others, life moves on without you whilst you are trapped in a self-enforced prison of your destructive thoughts. And from that, there is no escape. Yet, I survive daily. An each day, I wake again and I rise.</p>
72	I survived abuse	<p><u>I survived abuse</u></p> <p>My back story is that about 6 years ago I was in an abusive relationship with a man who emotionally abused me and regularly raped me. He made me feel like no one would ever love me and this was how my life would be forever. I haven't told many people this story because I felt so ashamed, he led me to believe that I brought this on myself and I deserved it, other people that I told couldn't understand how I got myself in that situation instead of being angry at him for hurting me. For people that haven't been in an abusive relationship it's so hard to understand why you don't just leave but I felt so trapped, I would get the affection and love that I needed just for it to be ripped away the next minute. I felt like I could 'fix' him, get him back to how he used to be when he was sweet and loving, he made me believe that if I put effort and commitment into the relationship that things would be amazing. It's the hope that really gets you. I've been doing so well recently, the feelings never go away but you learn to cope and it's not such a big part of your day anymore.</p> <p>However, about a month ago I saw him at a local pub and had a panic attack in the toilets. I hated myself for allowing him to still have this much of an effect on me. It's taken me some time, but I know that I'm okay and I'm safe and I'm happier than I have ever been. It was an understandable reaction to someone who took so much away from me. It's not taken over my life again, it's still there but it's very small.</p>
73	I survived 3 c-sections	<p><u>I survived 3 c-sections</u></p> <p>3 C-sections (1986, 1987, 1990)</p>
74	I survived depression	<p><u>I survived depression</u></p>
75	I survived body hatred	<p><u>I survived body hatred</u></p> <p>I am a survivor. Because of the rape. It was my secret, my shameful secret. I hated me, I hated my body, I felt ugly. I tried to bury my secret; I was out of control. But today I love my body and I love me. It is part of my life story and an experience that I live with. I am proud that my body has created two humans (although three pregnancies – a miscarriage in the early weeks), its STRONG AF, it's a dancing instrument. I am fierce and free. I survived.</p>

76	I am surviving with PTSD	<u>I am surviving with PTSD</u>
77	I survived a toxic relationship	<u>I survived a toxic relationship</u> I survived being mentally and emotionally abused in the name of love. I survived the daily domination and cruelty, matched with the punishing, harsh words that accumulatively shattered my self-confidence and smashed out any feelings of worth. I survived the taunts, the threats, the passive aggressive declarations of love. I survived the knowledge that I was not good enough and that I was lucky to be at least thrown a few slithers of affection because nobody else would dare love anyone as awful as me. But, I got out. I survived.
78	I survived incest	<u>I survived incest</u>
79	I survived breast cancer	<u>I survived breast cancer</u> I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 42 and am now 55, so am 13 years on. Treatment was a difficult struggle in a patriarchal health system which tells us what we should and will have done to us ... rather than asking us what we would choose to happen. I made myself unpopular when I refused chemo and dangerous drugs, based on my own knowledge and research (I was in the middle of a nursing degree) and my gut instinct. I was accused of refusing chemo because I was being precious about losing my hair! Rather than taking toxic drugs, I chose to have my ovaries removed to stop me producing oestrogen. The result was immediate menopause and rapid weight gain! It has taken the ensuing years and a lot of work on myself, to accept my body for the beautiful thing it is, love it and nurture it, despite its many lumps and scars. I am goddess.
80	I survived cancer	<u>I survived cancer</u> Wow! This is me. My body that has survived so much! The body that I have not long realised that I have separated my soul/being/essence from - to survive. I was uncomfortable having pictures taken for this instalment and dreaded looking at the results. But for the first time in almost 55 solar returns, I looked at my body and thought, wow! Despite years of what a narcissistic mother has chipped away at with cruel words and actions, leading to anorexia, self loathing/doubt/belief which has been compounded with the partners I have chosen. Not once have I been their fantasy/ideal woman, but looking at these images, it does not matter, because this is me, my body, that for once I am in awe of! My body that carries me through this life, that has survived so much, narcissism, sexual, physical, mental abuse, rape, homelessness #metoo, five miscarriages (but blessed with two rainbow sons) assault with a spinal injury leading to operations/complications/debilitation since to come. Just as I thought I had had my fill of experiences to survive, the Big C came a knocking for my R breast almost three years ago. I survived that and on the first year 'anniversary' of my diagnosis I was reminded of my fave poem "Still I Rise" That is what my body has done over the years, despite everything and I had it inked on my body to remind me, that no matter what, still I rise.

81	I survived my past	<p><u>I survived my past</u>  At 6 years old I was raped by my mother's brother. More than once. He was mid 20's in age. My parents knew and did nothing. From that time in my life I've been a hot mess. Fast forward In 10 years... I lost my grandmother to cancer, my father to cancer, my son in a motorcycle wreck, my horse, my dog ,my marriage to an affair, my home because of the divorce, my business because of the divorce, my lady parts because of disease amd I was thrown into medical menopause.</p> <p>1 year ago I left my life in Colorado, my home, my job, my friends and the man I thought was my soul mate. I realised that he had drugged me and raped me when I was so sick following my surgery. I Sold everything and moved to Wisconsin to be Grandma and momma to my daughter.</p> <p>I have been single for the last 6 months and am trying desperately to find my footing in a place in my life that is obscure to me. I'm depressed.</p> <p>I am discovering so many things about myself.</p> <p>In the last few years I have changed the natural way I stand or walk so I can appear to have that thigh gap that "men love so much" and it has caused so many back issues.</p> <p>I'm insecure, alone, older, and terrified. I have chased men and relationships for the constant approval, looking for a father image and never finding it and I'm now trying to find me,</p> <p>Love me,  Do my life for me.  My body image is constantly a battle for me.</p>
82	I survived anorexia	<p><u>I survived anorexia</u>  Wow! This is me. My body that has survived so much! The body that I have not long realised that I have separated my soul/being/essence from - to survive.</p> <p>I was uncomfortable having pictures taken for this instalment and dreaded looking at the results. But for the first time in almost 55 solar returns, I looked at my body and thought, wow!</p> <p>Despite years of what a narcissistic mother has chipped away at with cruel words and actions, leading to anorexia, self loathing/doubt/belief which has been compounded with the partners I have chosen. Not once have I been their fantasy/ideal woman, but looking at these images, it does not matter, because this is me, my body, that for once I am in awe of!</p> <p>My body that carries me through this life, that has survived so much, narcissism, sexual, physical, mental abuse, rape, homelessness #metoo, five miscarriages (but blessed with two rainbow sons) assault with a spinal injury leading to operations/complications/debilitation since to come. Just as I thought I had had my fill of experiences to survive, the Big C came a knocking for my R breast almost three years ago. I survived that and on the first year 'anniversary' of my diagnosis I was reminded of my fave poem "Still I Rise"</p> <p>That is what my body has done over the years, despite everything and I had it inked on my body to remind me, that no matter what, still I rise.</p>
83	I survive with alcoholism	<p><u>I survive with alcoholism</u>  Even though I'm not drinking, I'm still an alcoholic for life. It's about how your body and brain react to alcohol, and I have been addicted since the first taste at the age of 12.</p>

		<p>Learning about how my addiction works has been key to living more comfortably with it, some people can have one drink and walk away - I am not one of those people! The chemical reaction which occurs sets off a craving which cannot be ignored and becomes all-consuming until it is satisfied.</p> <p>Knowledge is power, and just now at least, the banshee is sleeping!</p>
84	I survived a narcissistic mother	<p><u>I survived a narcissistic mother</u></p> <p>Wow! This is me. My body that has survived so much! The body that I have not long realised that I have separated my soul/being/essence from - to survive.</p> <p>I was uncomfortable having pictures taken for this instalment and dreaded looking at the results. But for the first time in almost 55 solar returns, I looked at my body and thought, wow!</p> <p>Despite years of what a narcissistic mother has chipped away at with cruel words and actions, leading to anorexia, self loathing/doubt/belief which has been compounded with the partners I have chosen. Not once have I been their fantasy/ideal woman, but looking at these images, it does not matter, because this is me, my body, that for once I am in awe of!</p> <p>My body that carries me through this life, that has survived so much, narcissism, sexual, physical, mental abuse, rape, homelessness #metoo, five miscarriages (but blessed with two rainbow sons) assault with a spinal injury leading to operations/complications/debilitation since to come. Just as I thought I had had my fill of experiences to survive, the Big C came a knocking for my R breast almost three years ago. I survived that and on the first year 'anniversary' of my diagnosis I was reminded of my fave poem "Still I Rise"</p> <p>That is what my body has done over the years, despite everything and I had it inked on my body to remind me, that no matter what, still I rise.</p>
85	I survived assault	<p><u>I survived assault</u></p> <p>Wow! This is me. My body that has survived so much! The body that I have not long realised that I have separated my soul/being/essence from - to survive.</p> <p>I was uncomfortable having pictures taken for this instalment and dreaded looking at the results. But for the first time in almost 55 solar returns, I looked at my body and thought, wow!</p> <p>Despite years of what a narcissistic mother has chipped away at with cruel words and actions, leading to anorexia, self loathing/doubt/belief which has been compounded with the partners I have chosen. Not once have I been their fantasy/ideal woman, but looking at these images, it does not matter, because this is me, my body, that for once I am in awe of!</p> <p>My body that carries me through this life, that has survived so much, narcissism, sexual, physical, mental abuse, rape, homelessness #metoo, five miscarriages (but blessed with two rainbow sons) assault with a spinal injury leading to operations/complications/debilitation since to come. Just as I thought I had had my fill of experiences to survive, the Big C came a knocking for my R breast almost three years ago. I survived that and on the first year 'anniversary' of my diagnosis I was reminded of my fave poem "Still I Rise"</p> <p>That is what my body has done over the years, despite everything and I had it inked on my body to remind me, that no matter what, still I rise.</p>