

**Writing
by Sex
Trade
Workers
Past & Present**



Stories from the Margins

Edited by Dorothy Field and Jannit Rabinovitch



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and
Jannit Rabinovitch

Sponsored by the
Prostitutes Empowerment,
Education and Resource Society (PEERS)

Canada



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It takes a whole village to create a prostitute.
—Anon

INTRODUCTION

The sex trade can be a shocking world. Knowing about the lives of Sarah, Barb and Gwen keeps me from falling back into the middle class complacency of my relatively easy and privileged life. It provides me with a very personal window on Victoria that shows what others can't or won't see. There are many reasons why I think it's important to share this world. I have been told by several different women, all separately, that they figure in their eight or ten years in the trade they each have had about 10,000 tricks. Think of the enormous waste of human potential when we push the women and men in the sex trade into the shadows and back alleys of our community, unable to speak about their lives without shame.

I'm fascinated by what I hear from others when I tell them I work with sex trade workers. The most common response, predictably, is that since prostitution is the oldest profession in the world I shouldn't expect much to change. I can think of about a thousand "professions" that must have pre-dated prostitution. Building shelters, finding food, planting seeds, helping in child birth, raising children, teaching skills, healing. Even religious ritual, politics and creative art probably came before prostitution but how convenient that every man,

woman and child in North America, anyway, hears regularly that prostitution is the oldest profession. It certainly works well for those who want to maintain the status quo.

The next most common response is, "Someone has to do it." And that would be because...Oh, I know the answers. Because men have these urges and they have to have somewhere to take them. Urges like beating women up and raping them and, oh yes, killing them. Of course that's not what the women, and it is always women, who say this mean. They mean sexual urges for which our society does not provide appropriate outlets. And I suppose in some circumstances that could be true. But mostly I think the women mean that if we have someone who is willing to have sex with all those guys, our daughters will be safer. Doesn't seem to be working out that way. Clifford Olson honed his technique on sex trade workers and then he moved on to "normal" children. Besides it strikes me as interesting that all those young women in the sex trade are being sacrificed for us and we don't even acknowledge it, let alone appreciate it. And how convenient that so many of them just happen not to be white.

The third response is that there is no victim, nobody gets hurt, it's a business transaction and should be seen as a legitimate career just like any other. To this I answer: maybe. Maybe it could be like that if women

had other choices, if prostitutes were accepted as legitimate business people, if they had the same rights and benefits as other workers. But in reality, most of them hate their work and can only stand doing it stoned out of their bodies. I wish every “John” could overhear a group of prostitutes discussing how they feel about having sex with their clients.

The sex trade may indeed provide an essential service to men and women who otherwise do not have access to sex or to the particular sexual activities they would prefer. But if that is the case, why not recognize the trade as just that, a trade, with all the benefits of a trade, workers’ compensation, unemployment and disability insurance, a pension plan, paid holidays, etc. Why should it be shrouded in shame and secrecy when sex trade workers are obviously performing a service that the market demands?

I realized that before I can expect the people of my community, any community, to change all of their conceptions and misconceptions about the sex trade they, too, need a chance to see inside this community, to see past the carefully constructed walls that separate our worlds. I hope that by organizing this four month workshop and putting together an exhibit, this book and a new gallery section on the PEERS web site [www.peers.bc.ca], a few bricks will have been removed and a window provided in that wall.

In designing the project I thought we would find twelve people who wanted to attend the workshop each week and share themselves in art and writing. Soon after we started we had to have two groups because there were so many people who wanted to participate. Many of those who came week after week had never participated in anything like this before. Among the participants are people who continue to work in the sex trade because they like their work, others because they like the money and others because they feel trapped and see no alternative in these harsh economic times. Ongoing addictions and mental health issues are not an impediment to working in the sex trade. The sex trade provides one of the few employment options available to people in our community who would love to have other gainful employment (on their good days) but whom no one will hire. Within these pages is a world of grief and rage and resilience and survival and hope. Welcome.

Jannit Rabinovitch,
Project Coordinator and one of the founders of PEERS

We sit around the table, sometimes talking, sometimes writing in our notebooks, sometimes painting or drawing in sumi with a cedar bark brush. We are mostly women, a few men, ranging in age from our early twenties into our fifties. As an artist/writer and co-facilita-

tor, you might think I was the one dispensing wisdom. In fact, it's an exchange. I guided the writing exercises and the art. In return, the circle has guided me, opening for me a window into the world of sex work. The participants called the group "class", but I was the one in school, hearing stories, learning a new language.

All of us except for Jannit and me are or have been in the sex trade. Jannit has been involved with PEERS from the beginning. I am the newcomer. I've driven down Government Street at night, staring at the women on the corners, torn between curiosity, prurience, and heartbreak, never doubting that the hookers were Other. Now I know they are me or what I might have been if things had gone differently. The artists around the table share one thing, their history. Aside from that they are as mixed in personality and situation as any random group. Some have been clean and sober for years; some are trying to get off drugs. Some work straight jobs; some are committed to their work in the sex trade; some work to find new ways to live.

PEERS is neither pro nor anti-trade. Some of the voices around the table take pride in sex work. Some hate it. The Society exists to help those who choose to exit and to help those who choose to stay in to stay safer.

Our weekly meetings went straight to the heart of things. I often wished I could capture the spirit in the room—witty, wild, irreverent, deeply serious, some-

times raunchy, always real. We didn't shy away from the hard stuff—early hurt and abuse, struggles with addiction, what it's like on the street at 3 am on a winter's night. Each person had the choice not to share what he or she had written, but mostly we wanted to. What struck me was the talent quotient, the level of sheer creativity and intelligence. This was not therapy, though it was probably therapeutic. These are artists pure and simple telling stories through the media of art, writing, and photography.

Writing the hard stuff is revolutionary. It has the power to recreate bridges that were razed, to heal shame and silence, to create community. Some of what we've done in our groups has been abstract and wordless. Some has been a barrage of language, phrases, and photographs cut from magazines and collaged. We've walked a tightrope, keeping the balance between telling the story and holding our boundaries. The only real rule was that each of us had to monitor our own safety.

We entered tentative, not sure whether we could trust, how much to expose. Sharing our art and writing put each of us in a vulnerable and potentially dangerous place. The circle has the power to midwife wholeness and integrity. We each brought our various inner resources. With these we built a container strong enough to hold our own and each other's vulnerability. During our time together we've shared our zest for life,

the stubbornness that fuels possibilities, our incredible strength and survival skills, our deep commitment to ourselves and our kids. We've struggled with depression and the feeling of being overwhelmed. We trusted the circle and it held.

Jannit and I asked the artists to tell their stories in their own words unmediated by social workers, researchers, or government officials. This was their chance to open their experience to the public at large. The participants saw our project as outreach, hoping their stories might serve as cautionary tales for others. Many programs are designed to fix what's wrong with the people attending. We believed in what each participant had to offer in the way of strength, wisdom, and a piece of the truth.

The circle's honesty builds community. Many of the artists had known each other for years. Even so, within the circle they shared stories that had felt too raw to tell in any other circumstance. Jannit and I talked about the hubris of designating the world of the sex trade as the margins. The circle welcomed me in from my own margin of safety and privilege.

These words and images are offerings of courage, heart, and generosity – a doorway for all of us who want to know ourselves, our children (because most people enter the sex trade as children, sexually exploited youth), and our city better. Some of the pieces

in this collection were written as exercises during our group; some were written on the writers' own time. Some pieces will bring you to very hard places; some are idealistic and full of hope. Come on in, pull up a chair. It's a tough ride but you'll come away richer.

Dorothy Field,
Co-facilitator

When I heard about the idea that Stories from the Margins would involve past and present people in the sex trade being able to tell their personal stories through visual and written work, I was excited to be a part of coordinating the project. I was privileged to be able to attend the weekly sessions, as the stories and people's lives unfolded. Over the sixteen weeks I began to establish a safe, trusting, respectful relationship with the participants. We shared times of pain, anger, and sadness, but we also shared times of serenity and laughter. I felt that this helped both the participants and myself grow as individuals.

Yvonne Barnett,
Assistant Coordinator

I was one of two program coordinators for the Stories From the Margins project. I was lucky enough to get the

opportunity to give back as well as have the chance to tell some of my personal story. Here is a little background on my story, where I have been, and where I am going.

I have been on my own since I was 13 years old, and living on the streets of Vancouver. The next thirty years of my life were a constant battle. I would try to clean up and get off the drugs without changing my life style or the people I associated with. I spent a lot of time in and out of jails including the penitentiary because of my addiction. It seems at times that I was just caught up in a vicious circle and couldn't seem to find the proper exit. Then I found Sandy Merriman House, an emergency shelter for women. I was at the time sure that I would end up dead soon if I didn't find a way to change my life. The staff was very caring and supportive in helping me to believe that I could do anything that I set my mind to. They told me about programs being offered at PEERS, programs to teach life skills, anger management and free counseling to work through some of my issues. I knew that if I ever wanted to be successful at leaving the street, prostitution as well as drug addiction, I would have to find a way to face my fears and stop running from my pain.

I successfully completed the RISE program in January 2000. I then felt that I had finally found something that I would not only be good at, but also something that I

have a passion for. That's when I decided to take some courses to further my education. I began with courses being offered at UVic, then went on to further courses at both Victoria Mental Health and Aids Vancouver Island. Then I felt ready to commit to an intense training program being offered at the Counselors Training Institute in Victoria. As of February 2003, I completed my training and I am now recognized as a counselor. I always knew that I wanted to be able to continue to do front line work and hopefully give back to the community.

I have to give thanks to all the participants that were involved with this project throughout the sixteen weeks. This has been a real thrill and honor to meet and work with them. I would also like to thank all those that got behind this project either with funding or support. I believe we have all done a really great job these past few months.

Deb,
Assistant Coordinator



GETTING INTO IT: *Flesh for Fantasy*

My very first experience was with my boss. He was about seventy years old. Used to be an accountant, then turned around and decided to open a massage parlor complete with Jacuzzi, hot tubs, massage tables, cedar wood paneling and showers. It was a really upscale place with four private rooms and one large executive room that included an eight-person hot tub and massage table. My boss needed to give me an orientation and we went into the hot tub first thing. He wanted to see if I could give a good blow job. I was suspicious and asked if I had to. He wouldn't say "yes" or "no." I pity the poor girls before and after me whom he led to believe that she had to do it in order to get or keep the job as "masseurse." He told me to always use my eyes as my best feature with clients. Play with my eyes, flirt. I never really knew exactly why but I did just that anyway.

> **Ramona**

I remember graduating from Business College when I was in my early thirties. By that time I was already a grandmother of two beautiful children. I applied for work everywhere, resume after resume. I could never get an interview. I graduated as a medical office as-

sistant, and I graduated with honors but no one would give me a chance. So I started to apply for all kinds of jobs. I dropped resumes off at just about every hotel and motel in Victoria in hopes that I could find work as a chambermaid. One Sunday afternoon I received a phone call from the Holiday Court Motel. They wanted me to start immediately. So I started. It was a poor and rundown motel. The owners were not interested in improving or renovating the motel. I did my best to keep the motel rooms as clean as possible. Sadly, it was here that I met a man. He was staying at the motel and I fell in love with him. We decided (after a few months) to move into and share a two bedroom apartment. This was a tragedy. He first introduced me to cocaine. At first I just snorted the drug, but eventually he introduced me to the IV needle. After one hit I was hooked. This was the beginning of my downward spiral.

> *Carol*

I went there with walking his dog in mind. I think that's all that was on my mind. At some point I did realize what I was doing. There was a word for it—turning a trick. I haven't a clue where I learned this word. I felt so pleased when I got the hang of it, when it became easy, almost fun. The money made me feel good about myself.

I remember walking home after being with Ted (I'm

pretty sure it was the time he rented a motel room), proud I'd had the nerve to turn a trick. I did it! I did think of all those who had tormented me. I felt good because I was pretty sure they didn't have a "Ted" who really appreciated them, who talked with them, who listened to them. We really talked, Ted and I. For hours, it seemed. He did seem genuinely interested in what I had to say, what I was thinking...

He did get strange sometimes. I remember him going to jail—a few years later when I lived in the same city as he did. He said it was for drunk driving, and I believed him because I think I was with him the day he drove drunk like that and would have been arrested. He came around to open my door, and sadistically—his face literally changed—he moved to quickly slam the door on my leg with a lot of force as I was about to get out of the vehicle. But that could be mixed up with another time he was scary like that, in his green welder's truck. Very scary. I couldn't find the seat belt, and believe me I was looking for it. He knew I was scared. I thought about jumping out of the moving truck

But it was not Ted I was going to write about. It was Ray. He was pretty old, old enough to talk about retirement. He drove a red striped truck—an ugly coincidence. So I walked his dog, I guess. I remember his dog, but not walking it. I remember the filth of his house. I had never seen a sink like that. Or a kitchen

floor. His wife had left him. He was living in filth. I think I did those disgusting dishes, put my hands in that water with God only knows what else. I remember scrubbing his floor, and he was behind me making comments about my ass. A well-rounded tiger is what he called me. I dusted his TV, and there was a porno on. I tried not to look, to seem like all was just fine. No porno on, and no matter if there is. I remember the gun he showed me. Silver & ivory. A hand pistol. A real gun, he assured me.

I really had him going for some time. I knew what was going to happen. Maybe he'd told me, though not with direct words. I'd call him close to 4 or 5 pm. He got off work at 5 pm I think. "I need the money now." I usually said that I owed it for some dope I'd bought earlier in the day, with the arrangement to pay for it soon after, but whatever had happened—something had happened—I'd lie, make something up—and now I had no money and really needed it. I make the most ridiculous excuses for things now, so I can only imagine the excuses I used then. He could not have believed me.

I guess that's why I knew what would eventually happen. I didn't think about it. I had an 'Oh well' sort of attitude. I'll deal with that bridge when I cross it and with any luck, I'll be under the influence of something. But it was always in the back of my mind to some degree. He was getting angry. I'd get the money, and

always, always promise to meet him later to pay up. Never, never did. I had no intention to ever meet him later. I certainly did not want to pay up.

The day did come indeed. I don't recall being in his truck too often. Maybe it was just that one time, which would mean he gave me that large vibrator then, too. I think I was fifteen by then, because I seem to recall that age being said. He said I should be using one of these by now, by my age. I thought it was disgusting and wondered how on earth I'd get it into the house and where I'd keep it, this larger than life 'toy'. Oh God, if my Mother sees this.

There were so many deserted roads. Roads to nowhere. Roads to trouble. To remnants of deserted ghost towns, of which there were many. For good reason, I'm sure. We were overlooking a lake. How did he start it, what did he say—I really don't know. I remember chanting over and over—*think of getting stoned after, Al*. Maybe that's when my Sweetheart started talking to me. *Think of the drugs you will buy, Al, think how really really stoned you'll get, okay—it will be over soon. Try not to taste.*

I got so disgusted at one point. Really, I couldn't go on. I opened the passenger side door and started gagging. I was not exaggerating. He was on a rampage how he could get a blow job uptown for \$50, and look how much \$\$\$ he'd given me already. *Think of getting*

stoned, Al, think how good you'll feel. This will be over soon this will be over soon. Think of the drugs.

I got so used to things after a while. I still played around with him. "I promise, promise, promise Ray I'll meet you later. But I need the \$\$\$ now." Tit for tat was how he put it. He got really angry.

> **Ally**

Well, I had no illusions of grandeur. I entered the sex trade full of other illusions. First and foremost I felt that I had to hide in the back streets for fear of being discovered by people who I believed would shame me. I also had the illusion that when a trick would ask if I was old enough, I had to lie about my age for fear of being rejected because I was underage. I thought that this was a downfall. Now I know that the tricks would prefer the younger girls. I am no longer under any illusions about being in the sex trade, in fact I am kind of sad that I know better, that most people couldn't give a shit whether I was there or not. I know that youth was a major bonus, rather than a disadvantage. Now, I know that the men that frequent the corners I have stood on only care about two things, "getting it done" and "not getting caught."

> **Lisa**

It all started when I met this man. I had two kids with him. He got me on drugs. Then welfare took the kids away from me. Then the man that I was with put me on the street for drugs. It went for weeks then months and I was so deep in drugs, I was on the street for years. The man that I was with was always around. He left me in a poor state. The state still has my two kids. I hate him for what happened to me. He lived off my dirty money and drugs. I hated him so much for what he had done to me. It has been my fault, too. He and drugs were more important than my kids. But now I see a new light and it is very bright. I need to see my boy and girl and now they are not together. I feel sad about that.

> **Sandy**

I was born on April 16, 1973, left home at fourteen or fifteen years old. My mom beat me. Not living anywhere, out on the street. At seventeen years old I started working the street. Twenty I got pregnant and had first baby. At twenty-one-and-a-half, had second baby. Twenty-four had twins. Lost them to welfare. The whole time, seventeen to twenty-eight years I was a hard core addict. Now I have been clean for two years.

> **Shelley**

WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT THE SEX TRADE BEFORE I ENTERED:

This is Not a Movie... You Cannot Change the Channel

I used to know women (girls really) who were involved with selling their bodies on the street to support heroin habits. I was 13 or 14 at the time and I didn't use drugs or drink. I was an escapee from a reform school where I had been sent for being "incorrigible." I didn't really understand what all the terms meant like soliciting. I did know that C used to get so dope sick (she was 17 years old) that she turned out her twelve-year-old sister. C and her boy friend began pimping her baby sister to supply the money to pay for their heroin habits. Within a few months they had turned her into an addict too so that it was easier to control her. I felt both sad and angry because she had been the only friend I had on the street that was my age. It was hard for me to accept that there was nothing I could do about it. I watched how much she changed after getting into drugs and hooking. She told me that she hated how the men made her feel and with the drugs she didn't need to think about it or feel anything. Little did I know at the time that I was going to be in the same place in a couple of years and not be able to get out of that life style for another thirty years.

> *Deb*

My sister Miranda got caught down in Victoria for the 1996 snowstorm. We lived in Courtenay. My sister was hanging with this girl who I knew was a slut but I never knew she was a hooker. I was sitting on the bed listening to them talk when somehow she let it slip that she did work as a hooker when she was in Victoria. I was devastated. I just couldn't believe it. Shortly after that, she began working as an escort in Courtenay. We were going to work at it a couple of hours daily, then we would just go home. I thought "Wow, what a great job!" Of course at that time, I had never done it. Being a hooker now I understand why she didn't want to tell me.

> *Autumn*

Before I started the sex trade I had different feelings about it. One was that I used to wonder why the starving children in Africa were in fact starving. I mean why didn't they just start working or something. I also thought that I could find a rich older man to have sex with and in return he would give me a place and whatever I needed. Then I started meeting prostitutes that wanted me to start working but I used to think, me, a prostitute? I'm better than that and it's something that you're not supposed to do.

> *Jonathan*

Like most people I had formed an opinion about prostitutes. I saw them as being untouchable, crass, classy, beautiful, and in a career of their own choice. I saw, I guess, what I wanted to see. Later, when I was initiated into the world of night clubs and prostitution, I not only saw but lived it. Not pretty, away from the bright lights into the dark bedrooms. Dressing up in fancy clothes, just so I could take them off again for money. Looking chic yet away from prying eyes I was degrading myself just for the almighty dollar. Most of the time I can't or won't even admit to myself just how dirty I felt with some of my regular johns. They were the ones I saw a number of times per month for good money because of their kinky needs or sexual perversions.

> *Deb*

I never gave much thought to prostitution. I was well into my late thirties when I began. I grew up in Montreal where there were many prostitutes. I remember driving past a hooker. The time was about 2:00 am. I remember thinking how cold the night was with a harsh wind. I could see her shivering, pulling her crossed arms tight against her sides. I felt pity. I was quite naive back then and had no clue as to why a woman would be a prostitute. Nevertheless, I never looked down on them. It made me feel sad. It is hard to imagine, that

almost two decades later, I was standing on that very same corner, feeling cold and tired holding my arms close to me for protection from the cold.

> *Carol*

I thought the sex trade was like any other job. That girls that provided the service kept some of the weirdos away. Being in the sex trade isn't all that glamorous, especially when you get addicted to drugs, and that is where all your money goes. You lose your self-respect. You lose your soul.

> *Sandy*

GROWING UP:

To Be Safe I Make Myself Small

You can deny it all you want but you and I both know what you did to me in the house on Howard Avenue. You came into my room while I was sleeping. You took off my panties and began touching me, rubbing your big grimy hands all over my chest and vagina. I looked over at you (you thought I was asleep but I wasn't), you stuck your fingers in me as you jerked yourself off. You were moaning with pleasure and I was crying inside. You were my Dad, someone I loved and cherished. I was your daughter, someone whose self-respect and self-worth you held in your

hands. What did I ever do to deserve that? I was a ten-year-old girl. I hate you, you son of a bitch. I was a fucking junkie hooker, selling my ass every day on Richards Street, and getting my ass beat every day by my pimp for not making enough money. Why did I choose that life? I didn't. You were the one that taught me my body wasn't sacred. That it was there for the taking.

> *Sarah-Maria*

I feel like I was in the sex trade years before I ever entered. I was always treated as a sexual being, more like an object really. Men would take freely of me not only sexually by rape or molestation, but also by the way I was treated verbally and emotionally. I was always told that I was a slut and that I wanted it and was going to get it. This could be conveyed in a look that was passed in a wink or a smirk, often accompanied by a "I know you want it" or a "let me stick my finger up there", "come on—you'll enjoy it". Or I was stupid and needed to get fucked. Or he would grab me by my breasts whenever he was close to me. I was always grateful that it didn't get too much worse than that, although it did last for years, the abuse.

That was my foster father. Before that, I was at another foster home where my foster mother called me a slut and didn't trust me near boys. It was really the other

way around. Boys and men shouldn't have been the ones to trust. I *was* the innocent one. They were always wanting to violate me, my trust. I was always really close to entering the sex trade through other people. Not by my choice, always others' ideas of what they wanted to do with me, or to me. Never for me.

When I was thirteen, I was living on the street and I was raped at gunpoint by a black guy and two white guys. Lucky for me the other two guys didn't do much to me. One guy was really drunk and kept leering and grabbing me and then he left me alone. The other guy took me for a walk in the field (we were out of town on a baseball field) and talked to me while the black guy raped my friend (foster sister). It hadn't quite worked out with me and he raped her, too.

The black guy on the drive back to town turned out to be a pimp and he wanted me to work for him in LA on the street. He told me I would have diamonds, furs, nice clothes, etc. I certainly did not want to do that at all. Somehow in the end of the ride, the black guy and the tall guy who took me for a walk, got into an argument, and the tall guy made the black guy let me go. This was all while I had a gun to my head. I don't know how or why, but I hid out for a long time afterwards. That was a close call for the sex trade.

The next time was when I was seventeen and my foster father, Jake, and my boyfriend, Dave, wanted

to open up a brothel and have me work in it. They planned to make lots of money off me. They had plans all right where I had no say in it. Lucky for me, I ended up just selling drugs for my foster father instead. It was another close call.

> **Ramona**

My former boyfriend got invited to his high school reunion just at a time in my life when I was grieving missed potential. I think it shot our relationship to hell. Because, after all, who did I spend my formative years with? Pimps and johns, all of them. Who can I call if I want to reminisce about old times? John, Jack, Henry? Who? I'm not even supposed to want to reminisce about my traumatic adolescence, but sometimes I do. After all, it's the only one I'll ever have.

> **Gwen**

Iam from a broken home. My mother kicked my father out when I was three and a half years old. I am the third or middle child. Their separation and later divorce was very hard for me as I was daddy's little girl. We were never told the why's and so I felt for a long time that I had done something wrong and that he left because he stopped loving me. In the few and rare occasions when he would come to visit, my mother discouraged it for reasons I didn't understand.

I don't remember my mother having but two boy-friends after that period. I do remember always trying to win my mother's love and approval. I needed to know that she loved me as much as the others but I never felt very important. Then along came a man who fell in love with mom and transferred from the RCMP to the local police department. I was eleven years old.

I don't remember the exact day that he started to touch my "private" place but I do still remember the bedroom, sun slanting through the curtains, his body smell, the smell of a hand lotion of my mother's that he used to lubricate me or his finger, I don't know which. I can still feel how afraid I was to move. I pretended I was still asleep just hoping he'd hurry up and finish. All the while I was saying a prayer that he would not try to say anything and hoping my mother wouldn't think I was trying to take her new boy friend away. So it began, my feelings of shame, guilt, fear of being blamed and no longer being lovable.

I don't remember having a first date. That's because unlike other girls my age where they were meeting boys at school and going to school dances or the movies I was in reformatory. I was supposedly sent there for three months for being incorrigible. My mother's "fiancé," the cop, convinced her to send me there for a few months to scare me so I wouldn't run away from home any more. I was thirteen years old. I was the

youngest person there for the first few months. Then a twelve-year-old came in. My mother married just one month after I was sent away. She didn't find out until much later that when she agreed to the courts sending me to the reformatory, she was signing me over to the children's aid and I became a ward of the courts until I was eighteen years old so I never went home again. So back to the dating thing—I was nineteen years old and had kicked my habit for a few months and was asked out on my first date for New Year's Eve 1973.

> *Deb*

My name is Sandra Lynn, born June 7, 1964 in Ottawa, Ontario at the civic hospital. Lived with my mother who was a single parent. Met my dad when I was nine years old. Grew up with my half-sister, Kelly. Grew up meeting other siblings I never knew I had. My mother was an alcoholic, emotionally and physically abusive. Kids were seen and not heard. I often felt insecure, scared and couldn't fit in. Was put in a foster home when I was thirteen years old. Lacked that one person to talk to when I was growing up, lack of self-esteem. All hopes and dreams vanished. Was in group homes, jails, institutions. Had a boy at nineteen and later had a girl. The kids are now seventeen and thirteen. My son works part-time at a restaurant and goes to school. My daughter is thirteen and goes to school and

plays on the provincial soccer team. I've had many jobs such as working in an appliance store, a pizza place, as a nanny, home support worker, volunteer at the care homes for elderly, cleaning and the sex trade. Went to St. John's Ambulance for standard first aid course and went to college for resident care attendant course and did my practicum at Oak Bay Lodge. I have a great sense of humour and value my family and friends. I enjoy walking on the beach, candlelight dinners, fishing, boating, camping, reading, and travelling. If I was to change one thing in this world it would be to bring back the barter system. If I was hungry I could clean your yard. Not only would I get a meal but also some work experience.

> *Sandy*

Like combat veterans, prostitutes suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) a psychological reaction to extreme physical and emotional trauma. 130 prostitutes from San Francisco and 110 from Thailand had higher PTSD scores than 123 Vietnam veterans requesting treatment and 1,006 Gulf War veterans.

Melissa Farley, 1995

Belief patterns I inherited from my family:

- Doing drugs and drinking to avoid pain is OK.
- To stay in an abusive relationship regardless of your unhappiness.
- That my body isn't sacred.
- You have to fight to be heard.
- Violence and threats are accepted.
- Life sucks.
- Nobody respects anybody.
- To be dishonest
- Love of self is non-existent
- You gain wisdom through strife.
- Pain is a teacher

> *Leah*

In a perfect world I have not been so scattered. In a perfect world I would have had a father who loved me no matter what. In a perfect world I wouldn't have been raped. In a perfect world I wouldn't have been hit. In a perfect world my mother could have stopped it. In a perfect world I wouldn't have a drink. In a perfect world I wouldn't have become an addict. In a perfect world I should be loved.

> *Johanna*

IN THE LIFE:

She Wasn't Selling her Body... She Just Needed Drugs

Every time that I went to work there would be a moment that all my insecurities would arise. I would go over a list, am I dressed sleazy enough or am I dressed too sleazy? Then I would look around at the competition and think that I'm not pretty enough to be here. I wish I had more cleavage or wish I wore the other outfit. When the streets were lined with all of us working girls, I would feel somewhat intimidated and less than all the others. I felt that all the other girls had an edge over me. All of this and more could and did happen in a moment.

> *Lisa*

Iremember a cold Sunday night working on the corner. Sunday was the night to work. The guys had spent all their allotted weekend money. It was winter, cold, and desolate, but most of all it was depressing. I remember it like it was yesterday. It was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop on the usually busy city street. I could feel everyone looking down at me from their different expensive condos, some in judgement, some in pity. Even if no one was really looking down at me that night, it felt like it they were. I guess that was

because I was looking at myself, not the usual trip inward that I took. I was seriously wondering how at fifteen I ended up drug addicted, standing on this corner, alone. I truly believe and felt that on that Sunday night in the big city, I was alone...

> **Jason**

It's cold, cold. FUCK!!
I can feel each snowflake's sharp points breaking the skin just under my toes. The sun is very bright but that only means it is colder than it seems.

It's cold, cold. FUCK!!

How am I going to do this? Where is the place that works the best? I can't walk anymore. My ankles are locked in four inches of snow.

Look up. I imagine I'm not here. Make the sun hot. Ya, that's right I'm having a sweating bottle of beer.

Listen, there is music.

Faint, but I pretend to turn it up loud. I hold up my hands and hang onto a cloud.

Move. I spin around, mouthing the words. The song in my ears, my heart leading the drum beat. Just keep dancing and never mind your feet.

Oh shit, there's someone watching. Damn, now I'm all red. A couple of construction guys across the way. Breaking from work, watching me sway.

It's cold, cold. FUCK!!

I might dance, but I can barely walk away.

> **Barb**

I was in the park waiting for someone when this older man in his forties offered me some drugs. I agreed and went for a walk with him. He then proceeded to invite me into his van. He said we should go for a drive, somewhere more private...I said, yes. We went to the beach in the van. He told me to pull down my pants. We then engaged in oral sex with me on the receiving end. He started smoking his drugs out of his little pipe and offered me some and I got hooked. He had lots of drugs and only gave me rations. He was ugly, like Freddy Kruger and I hated every minute of it.

> **Jonathan**

I was right about the sex trade and the feeling I had had that it was indescribable. Indescribably awful and laden with secrets. The sex trade is a world of its own. It has its own rules and little idiosyncrasies. It is a maze of various lands, all with new places to see and explore. The sex trade can look inviting on the outside, and on the inside, too. It smells like perfumes, colognes, sex, body odours, stale cigarettes, alcohol, coke and bad breath. It feels like wet, hot sweaty skin, hard flesh, pain, good, shit, bad, or nothing. It tastes of condoms sweaty skin, stale air, old cologne, alcohol, coke,

crack pipes and stress. The sex trade is like an onion, full of different layers.

> **Ramona**

I will try to take you on a journey with me on what is basically an average day in my life as an addict. I would like to say my day would start with me getting out of bed in the morning, but the reality is that I probably haven't slept for a few days. I have actually lost count of when I last slept and even though my eyes are dry and itchy, I will just throw some water in them so I will still be able to "look good" (and therefore be able to attract the johns needed so that I can make the money I need to go score).

In some part of my mind I know that I should probably get myself something to eat, but that will have to wait until after I score. So, out onto the street I go without even taking the time to shower first. I am already feeling the beginning of illness that accompanies my addiction to heroin. I am sweating, shaking, and if I don't land a "john" really soon I will be too sick to stay out on the street. At times like this I begin to drift back in my mind seeing the start of my decline into this dark world of addiction. I seem to recall that I started using drugs to mask the pain and guilt of the abuse I had experienced, not really thinking that I would end up needing it to get through the day. Along with the need for

the drug came the fear that I was caught up in a world of violence that became harder to get away from than anything that I had imagined. I had been living under a cloud as well as in a cloud. At times I think I have lost the ability to feel, I see so much violence, fear, pain and abandonment, that just to continue to survive I need to shut down so I don't go crazy.

Oh, great, here comes a likely john now. It doesn't matter how dope sick I feel, I am able to forget it temporarily knowing if I can get with this john I will have the money I need to go buy the drug. I need to be normal. When I am this sick I don't even feel the normal disgust or self-loathing for what I am about to do. The way I rationalize the act of selling my body is, if I wasn't a drug addict I wouldn't be doing this. Due to my addiction, I have been in and out of prison numerous times in my life. Time spent thinking about making some changes in my life when released. Like most plans it doesn't matter how good your plan is, if you don't have a support network in place (strike one), if you don't change your routine or area of living (strike two), and if you don't change the people you associate with (strike three).

I have tried to get out of the lifestyle before, and off the drugs, but it never lasted because I was never able to find help in the form of a treatment center for women. Yes, there are a number of day programs available

where counseling is offered, and there is an emergency shelter, but for 24 hour help and access to round the clock counseling and support, well! I have tried a lot of different things in my thirty years of addiction, and each time I ended coming back to the dark side of life, not because I wanted to—my romance with the underworld you might say, ended a long time ago. Have you ever heard the old saying, “Once an addict, always an addict”? I have heard it most of my adult life; I have also tried to disprove it, believing that it is up to the individual. I know now that the individual cannot do it alone. This burden of addiction that I carry is not just my problem; it is your problem as well. I am a someone that you try not to see if you pass me on the street, or you read about in the paper and say things like why don’t they “just say NO.” Believe me, when I tell you that most of the people who are addicted to drugs would like nothing better than to be able to believe that there really is life after drugs. For people like me to really believe, we need people who are ready to step up to the plate and help fund and staff treatment centers that are closer to home. Most addicts don’t want to go too far from their families.

> **Deb**

20 It seemed innocent enough to begin with. She wasn’t selling her body. She just needed the drugs. She, at

the young fresh age of nineteen would hang out on the streets of Vancouver with her friends. They were selling their bodies. She would spot for them while they worked and in trade she could get high. Get that feeling again. It didn’t take her very long to learn the lingo. Felt like overnight. Street lingo. She learned a lot about the street by just hanging with her friends, getting high.

At nineteen she began dancing and kept at that for just under a year. That was in Vancouver. God! It felt like she had everything. She was in control and powerful! She felt important. She felt sexy and special. During that year in her life, she had a boyfriend who lived off her earnings. He was a parasite. She would buy him anything he wanted —cigarettes, food, clothes. She would take care of all his needs with the money she made stripping. The more money he wanted from her, the more angry and resentful she became. She and her boyfriend eventually got into heroin and she had lost her job too because she and her boyfriend would fight so much and she would arrive at work all messed up. The boss got tired of that.

Her boyfriend, he broke up with her. It seems it should have been the other way around, her breaking up with him. He went to Ontario to live with his family and they got back together and carved out a long distance relationship for a year. Then they broke up. Best that happened for her.

She left Vancouver and came back to her hometown of Victoria, BC. Stayed out of dancing for awhile. She eventually became more addicted to heroin and started working the streets. She worked for the drugs. They kept her on the street. Where else would she get money for her habit?

The problem in Victoria though was that it was rare to find heroin here. So what usually ended up happening was that she would look for heroin on the street from some drug dealer and there would be none available. So she ended up buying coke instead. She had to get high on something. If she couldn't have heroin, then something else would have to do. Coke was readily available for her. It was in this way that her coke addiction began.

> *Ramona*

Once I lived in the attic of the Lum family who resided above their grocery store in Edmonton's Chinatown. For nearly a whole winter I lived in that cold, greasy attic, sleeping on a comforter on the floor and cleaning the store in exchange for room and board. Every night at 6 pm, after I finished mopping the store, I would climb up the old dark wooden stairs and sit with the Lums and their three little kids. Their kitchen had three different kinds of wallpaper and a lamp that hung too low over the table. We ate rice and cabbage and

beef sliced very thin. The same ingredients every night, sometimes stir-fry, sometimes soup. Still crispy cabbage with papery squares of beef in thin rice gruel was my preferred meal, as this was generally my breakfast. Usually, I got up about 4 pm and cleaned the store before arriving for my daily, breadless, meal.

Mr. Lum kept anything that had fallen on the floor during the day to present to me when I came to clean. In my recollection, these little offerings were frequently composed of oranges and petite jars of maraschino cherries. However, early on in this arrangement, I got a bad craving for dill pickles. Hormones might explain why I wanted crisp and sour dills to go with my soft sweet cherries. Anyway, the dill pickles were on the top shelf. Upstairs, in my cell, I practiced and schemed. Found an old empty sauerkraut jar in the rubble out back and set it up on the narrow filthy shelf in my room. I borrowed the mop to practice knocking the jar off the shelf. Finally I learned to knock the jar off the shelf, using the mop handle, and catch it before it hit the ground. Before I could regale him with my athletic pickle-saving feat (which I hoped would earn me a free jar of pickles), Mr. Lum saw that I was working up to something and gave me a "special, one-time gift." I chose the pickles. I ate them all while I was still hung over and got sick. It looked like relish.

Steve brought me to the Lums. I remember it was

after some all night orgy that he drove me down 97th Street through the gates of Chinatown. We came through the shop door on a gleaming October morning and Mr. Lum rushed over to greet Steve (I was left listing drunkenly in the doorway). They talked and decided I would stay. Mr. Lum led us up to the attic with Steve walking behind me, alternatively patting and pushing my rump to keep me from bouncing off the walls on either side of the stairwell. I do not remember my first impression of the room, but I do remember listening to the Lums fight sometime that day or the next. They fought a lot in Chinese, for which I was grateful.

The attic was always dirty. I felt like I was always dirty, too. No amount of scrubbing got me or my habitat clean. It was uncomfortable, and probably, of more concern to me at the time, unbecoming. Sometimes Steve would leave boxes there and I always wanted to sleep on them, thinking it would be softer, but I didn't. I never touched them. I had to go down to the Lum's suite to do laundry, which meant an uncomfortable evening, with only Mr. Lum and his eldest child to speak to in English. Unfortunately, Mr. Lum was chronically exhausted and the only thing his child ever said to me was "big eyes" in varying tones of accusation. Mostly, I just packed up whatever clothing I had and gave it to Steve. He would give me something back the next time; often they were not the same clothes.

The only thing I didn't give to Steve was a white linen suit that I had taken with me when I left Matthew. I put this on and called him one time from the phone in the Lum's store. That must have been in October too, because I remember the sunlight made me squint while I was on the phone. I didn't think I could stand it anymore: the drinking, Steve's parties and the Lums' disgusting little establishment. I couldn't handle any more cabbage and grime. I told Matthew where I was and to come and get me but he said I had to wait until he got off shift. It was dark by then.

There is a scene in my mind of him pulling up in the dark green car, the snow crunching under the tires. And there I am. Toes hanging over the curb, a tall girl in a white linen suit with hair turning white from the snow, watching. That I see like a scene from a movie. But then I recall feeling light headed as I bent to look through the passenger window and all the beatings, the drinking and losing the baby while he stood out in the hall at the hospital flooded back into my conscious. Everything bad came into that passenger seat, between him and me. As he reached across to pop open the door, I was already turning away to walk around the building and go back upstairs.

Otherwise I only wore the suit to meet my mom for lunch once every couple of weeks. I didn't tell her where I was living, didn't want her to come pick me

up. Of course, these lunches required that I rise early, around 11 am and that was difficult after partying all night, so psychologically, I was usually a mess. I don't remember much about these outings except the last one. I'm sure she talked mostly about herself and my brother, just like she does now. But the last time we met for lunch, at Earl's on the south side, I recall that time very well.

The night before I'd done a few lines of coke with Steve's buddy, Noodles, so I was pretty alert. We sat in one of those semi-circular booths upholstered with parrot-print fabric. This must have looked rather appropriate with my white linen suit in February. We had salad and chicken fingers, which we shared off the same plates, like in the old days. When we were eating dinner alone together and "the boys," including my father, were at hockey, my mom and I used to go to the grocery store and buy a sirloin tip roast. She would take it home slice it into one and a half inch thick steaks and fry them up Chicago style. We would dish up the steaks and a salad on one big platter and eat it at the kitchen table with our legs touching. The hot juices from the meat wilted the greens, which I loved. The last time we had feasted like that, I was eleven. Four years later, there we were eating chicken fingers at Earl's, those days long over, but still in the habit of eating off the same plate. When, sipping her tea, Mom leaned back

and inhaled, I knew there would be trouble.

"You're looking a little the worse for wear," she started. I cringed. I opened my mouth to speak, but she went on. "I know you don't want to come home," she said flatly. I wanted to tell her about my home, how it wasn't there where she lived anymore. Instead, I looked into my teacup. My future wasn't there. Even though I knew she had lost a child, knew that she lived with a man who did not think of her as much more than chattel, knew she had comforted me when I was little, I couldn't tell her about the pain, about the miscarriage. Even though she knew, maybe even because she knew, I knew she could not relate. We were not going there and I was not going "home." I think that must have been the moment I internalized home. For many years afterward, I thought of home as a place that existed only inside me. Later on, when I was earning a lot of money, more even than I could spend on blow, I still didn't have anywhere to live. I just coasted from one john's place to my pimp's and back again. No place of my own. I think I was afraid it would look like the Lum's attic.

That night, as usual, Steve picked me up. I was raging inside and I wanted to flay the world. I went mad that night. Mad like a gypsy left behind because his foot's stuck in a bear trap, that was how I felt. So Steve picked me up and we went to the Larkspur, a jazz club

with leather arm chairs and stiff drinks. Two pitchers of screwdrivers later, the bouncer offered to drive me home, but I'd already caught on to his tricks. I knew it was his home he would drive me to, not mine. To this day, I can't stand jazz. Anyway, he said Steve would have to go and I left with him. We went clubbing. I must have danced with half the men in the city and some of their girlfriends. Somewhere during that evening, I convinced everyone sitting at the bar to buy me a drink. It was broad daylight when the evening ended. I had a tear at the side of my lip when I looked in the mirror the next day. It stung whenever I threw up, which happened a lot. This cut and the faint bruise above it, I thought, had something to do with Noodles and his fly. I could never be sure: he always seemed so obsequious. He was a tall, thin man, probably thin from all the cocaine. He moved with the grace of a whip and that was really the only classy thing about him. I was too sick to join Steve for the next go-round the following night. I remember being cold and sweaty at the same time, all balled up in my comforter on the floor. I swore off alcohol. I swore and swore.

And then the bugs came. I ignored them at first, or more accurately, I treated their arrival as just more filth in my already crusty bed. On they came, crawling between my toes, up my legs, through my pubic hair.

Their movement had that near-rhythm that makes the

brain try to hold the pattern. Of course, it can't, because there really isn't one. It's random but it seems regular. Crazy. When they got on my arms, I walked around naked in the frigid room, shaking my hands. Dancing oddly. I tried to rub them off against the greasy walls, but couldn't. They made me feel nauseous again, but my head couldn't take another bout of vomiting. I thought it would fall off in the toilet. I sat down on the comforter and looked for them, twisting and stretching the skin on the backs of my hips and legs around to find them. Brief glimpses were all I could catch. I just could not focus on them. This exasperated me so much I shook my head, even though my brain was simmering. I would have cut off my hair, shaved and bathed but I didn't think I had the wherewithal. I wanted a drink and thought that might stop my hands from shaking. I cursed Steve for not leaving me any booze. He never left me alone with the stuff, and I was too young and broke to buy it myself. Steve always had a lot of money, but he let me make my own way most of the time. I never complained to him about the Lums. I thought he had done me a favor. He had done the best he could to be sure I had a place to stay and a social life. Saint Steven, the good.

At some point, I relaxed enough to think maybe it was good I wasn't drinking. I was having a few clear thoughts, lying on the floorboards naked and shivering.

I knew I was utterly and deeply alone, floating on an icy lake. And it wasn't so bad. I started to think it was the drinking that caused everything, everything bad. I am grateful now that it didn't occur to me that it wasn't *my* drinking that caused these things. If I had put the blame on the men around me, well, the antidote would not have worked. Guilt, not blame, has a placebo effect.

I miss that baby still. For a while, it was just she and I. I used to talk to her, sing us lullabies before falling asleep. She was the hot water bottle wrapped in a towel that I cuddled every time I had a nap. But she was real, filling up my insides. For her, I bought an undershirt and a little red sweater with shell buttons. Walks with the pram, her in her little red sweater and me in my red wool coat and the buds just coming out on the trees was what I had in mind. Until she died and she came out in all that blood and slime. A sack of frozen bones bathed in sticky blood. And they never showed her to me, just kept slapping me to keep me from passing out before they knew she was dead and I was still alive. And Matthew stood in the hall and let them think what? I wonder. Certainly not that he had beaten me, not that he was that baby's father. What? That he had rescued this wrecked and beaten motherchild from certain doom. That he was my savior? I couldn't believe in him anymore.

Even though I was furious, and so desperately sad

and void, even though I was wishing it had never happened and believing it wouldn't have if I hadn't been drunk, even then and even now, part of me wants a drink. Something cold, shaken and dry to act as a kind of sympathetic magic to go with the hex.

I passed out, fell asleep or in some other way changed states of consciousness. I dreamt or hallucinated or both. Days passed and nights. There were no windows in the Lum's attic, so I couldn't really tell. Many images came and went. Lions and worms: I feared I would be consumed. Then came one very relaxing dream of lying in a high white bed, listening to piano music. I cried. Purged myself of tears until my heart hiccuped and the salt made tracks on my cheeks.

I got restless, too, and tried to walk up the wall to see if I could take a step before I fell. This does not work well: many times I fell back on my shoulders. Once I landed on my neck and had to spend time twitching on the floor before I could get up again. All this time, my psyche stood beside myself and watched. Just watched. Stuck in my body, I screamed. Hold me, hold me, hold me, I begged it.

I was standing when they came, at least from what I remember. They just materialized in the middle of the attic with a sheet warm from the dryer. The two adult Lums wrapped it around my naked shoulders and patted it on to me. A new skin, a warm Sunlight scented

new skin. “Big eyes,” said the eldest child who was standing against the far wall. She was calling me back, re-naming me.

When I left with Steve, months later, he handed Mr. Lum a wad of bills the size of an onion. But I don’t care. The Lums were good people. They were good to me.

> *Gwen*

When I first started working it was the attraction to the game, the life. But even more so attracted to the money that can be made and lost. Smoked, poked a rail. It all goes somewhere. Too bad I never put any away. Too bad I never made sure to get life insurance or even grow up normally.

> *Shelley*

Iremember one night. It was wet and cold and extremely late. It was one of those nights that everyone seemed to have no money and they offered twenty to thirty dollars which I won’t degrade myself so I wanted to give up but I really had nowhere to go. I was walking away and a man named Joey stopped and asked me if I needed a ride. I said “yes.” Me and him chatted about my situation and he rented a room for me for two nights, gave me one hundred dollars and pizza and pop, kissed my cheek and told me to take care. Because

he rented the room for two nights I figured he would be back to do a date but he really had no intention of having a date with me. He was just a nice guy doing something for a nice girl. No strings attached. Personally I asked for an angel for a long time and that night I think he sent me one.

> *Autumn*

Once when I was 14 years old I sat on a concrete bench in front of the library. I would frequent this spot on quiet days, waiting for dark, waiting for work. I was reading and engrossed in my fantasy when interrupted. “Are you ok?” I heard from my left side. Looking up to answer, I saw a slight young man with disheveled hair, stubbled chin, dirty sweatshirt, stained black jeans and loafers. I had noticed he had no coat and his ankles were exposed to the February air. I wondered casually where his socks might be. “I’m fine, why do you ask?” I said with honest curiosity. “You looked really sad sitting here,” he said while shifting back to fold his arms around his chest. “Where is your jacket?”

I thought he might have walked out of the library forgetting it behind. “Oh,” he said, “I don’t have one.” Now I knew where his socks were—nowhere, he had none. “What’s your name?” and he told me. “Come with me,” I said. I took him to the Army and Navy Department store and led him through the aisles, all the

while asking him questions about his situation. Punctuating every answer with “Here, hold this”, and I would give him a package of socks, razors, soap etc. By the end of our spree, I’d learned his story. How his friends had locked him out of his apartment. How he hadn’t slept for five days. How he had been sleeping in the library in the afternoon and walking the streets at night.

He asked why I had done this. Because he needed it, I told him. That’s when I left him. I turned and walked away, down the street I would work on, leaving him behind but warm.

> **Barb**

I can’t ever remember any such time that someone has helped me and never wanted something in return. If there was such a person, I can’t remember. God forgive me.

> **Shelley**

The sex trade
Cloaked in mystery
Shhh...
Permission to enter
Is not needed
Come inside
But
Beware...
Once you are in...
You may never get out...
unaware/ unbelievable/
unbeknownst
even if you think you are free
there will never be any escape
from this past...
oh possibly, possibly there may
be physical escape
if you don’t experience
flashbacks
or body memories
or flinch when touched
but the mind is a powerful tool
It never lets you...
Forget! Forget!
It never lets you.
Forget
Forget
Forget!!! Forget!!!

Neither does anyone else
Hush...child
Always at the tip...
Of your tongue...
The feeling, the knowing...
Always knowing
Not always feeling
Feeling
Feeling?
Hush...where am I right now?
Flashbacks, oh yes,
Shh...
Flashbacks, memories
you
You in your nakedness
Erect always erect
Waiting
For me.
Treat you like the
God you are...
Paying never enough for the end
product
Flesh.
Flesh for fantasy
Like a piece of prime rib.
Just waiting to sink

(continued on page 30)

may ticket to Toronto
 outside
 narrow -
 gry
 my
 er back -
 elings -
 → w/out of court
 → leave
 Team
 → w/ out of court
 → leave
 Team
 → w/ out of court
 → leave
 Team

how to make
 Sales
 Car
 Crash

Get Darlings!

Learn how to take
 pride in living
 22 yrs through danger
 - Hard Drug Experimentation

to fall between
 to survive
 (skill or not?)
 to Family
 Griev
 for old life
 hard feelings
 gone... healthy
 from good
 friendships
 learn
 talking on phone
 self-awareness
 public speaking
 Learning to
 write
 26 yrs
 leave trade
 work
 26 yrs
 leave trade
 work
 26 yrs
 leave trade
 work

Agency
 work begins
 • Fear of "hard drugs"
 • Hard Drugs
 • Drunk Alcohol
 • Trapped w/ pimps
 • Abuse damage

• PIMPS
 • Mass Confusion
 • FEAR
 • attempted murder
 by regular date

• Add's
 • Schiz

family of origin
 • able to let someone
 go
 • starting to be
 Scared on dates
 trying to be
 murdered
 • not caring

Death

Trying to die
 before my pimps do it,
 and do irresponsible acts
 realization police not
 since help
 need support
 need it

Learn to have
 (sweatshirt)
 Sensibility of safety
 Blame for mother

→ Victoria
 • Relating to
 other people
 • Anorexia
 • FEAR back

305
 Girl on
 Pines
 on
 Boyfriend

Staying Alive because of
 as if murder/ suicide my
 darlings w/ special needs.

Quality
 of
 life

D's
 Prescription
 Drugs

Contact to
 Hand
 horrible
 must be
 DEATH
 Real Skills House
 appropriate
 communication
 to get
 Reg...

Your teeth
Into me
Satisfaction guaranteed.
Look at me, you want to know...
Am I young enough?
Am I innocent-looking enough?
Do I kiss?
Am I firm enough?
Can you go down on me?
Am I pretty enough?
Can I French kiss you?
Are my breasts big enough?
Are they perky enough?
Are my legs long enough?
Am I sweet enough?
Am I nasty enough?
Am I friendly enough?
Do you do Greek?
Am I enough for you, sir?
So if I am just a piece of flesh
(liver in a bag)
I do
Not ask you: Are you—
 young enough?
 firm enough?
 big enough?
 nice enough?

 clean enough?
 gentle enough?
I do not ask you:
Can you pay me enough?
Will you pay me enough?
Will you ever pay me enough?
Can any amount ever be enough?
> **Ramona**

JOHNS: ***You And You And You***

Who wants to Swallow?
Cum is bitter and musky,
It tastes of disappointment and
decay.
Who wants to Swallow?
Cum is bitter and musky,
It tastes of disappointment and
decay.
> **Gwen**

there's you in that corner with
your black teeth and bad breath,
a man away from home to make
your fortune when your mates were
around I'd fuck them too, had to

watch though cause they'd beat me
up and steal back their money if I
wasn't careful

and you, you old bugger, lost ev-
erything to the drink, your wife
and your one true love the fucking
game the ritual first drinks and then
dancing to Sinatra and then cheese
sandwiches on stale bread proudly
served on chipped and greasy
china, then finally you'd strip me
down and try and get your bendy
old cock to harden, I hated the
waiting I hated the game

and you like a monster in the back
of the old bus garage, supposed to
be a quick handjob but suddenly
you were all over me, you pushed
your fingers so hard into my ass
that I had blood and shit running
down my legs and all I could think
was that if you killed me bus driv-
ers would find me in the morning

and you who complained that I

wasn't enjoying myself enough,
couldn't I sigh or moan, couldn't I
relax and have some fun

and you whose face I didn't even
see, the alley was dark, I was dope
sick and you came all over my
hands, I had no tissues or hankies,
and tried to rub the slimy mess into
my clothes

and you and you and you and how
many transactions, how many
trades of this for that, of your mon-
ey for my body, of your demanding
for my escape, how many trades
how many faceless empty painful
ugly moments how many times
does it take to kill me off how many
of you trying to obliterate me how
many blows to my core how many
heads nodding that I am nothing
more than a hole I am nothing
more than the sum of your desire I
don't exist beyond the moment of
your demand killing me slowly kill-
ing me one by one each of you did

you think that when I was a little
girl I dreamed of being a whore?

> *hermione magdelene*

The one from down the street.
The first, second and third ones.
After that they're a blur...
Irwin. And the snapping that took
place there.

The one who liked to scream with
ecstasy and madness in parking lots
when he finally came. He's the one
I saw other ways after we talked
about how impossible it would be
to ever see each other other ways.
What was that one's name I'm
thinking of now? Donny. That was
it.

The special place in my heart I still
have for Craig...

The cab drivers.

The Turk.

Ken. Now there's a word packed
with some ghastly feeling...

The Greek restaurant owner.

The other restaurant owners.

The Iranian restaurant owner and

running through the endless park at
night full of trees.

Then the car and the wife.

The one from the Indy.

Thousands like them whose faces
float in suspended animation some-
where in my existence. I'll see a
face from then and I wonder why I
am seeing it now, or ever.

The ones I started to believe be-
cause no one else was telling me
anything.

The brander.

The wrestler.

The ball player.

The soccer player.

The wheelchair man.

The amputee.

The egg shaped child-like man.

The deaf man where we talked
through the machine.

The dwarf.

The ones from Pennsylvania.

The one with the antique kit.

The one who had been in the
Olympics, portfolio in hand, who
reminded me of someone I once

knew and loved...
The one with all those snakes.
The one early morning sitting on a swing in his yard as
dawn broke, ducks at my feet.
The farmer.
The photographer of objects.
The 2 virgins.
The ones who made me work, and the one who bought
me a rose...
The banker with the green pendant.
The students.
The veteran who got me in the end.
The senior citizens.
The deathbeds.
The poets...
The pharmacist.
(excerpted from a longer poem)
> **Ally r.**

It was my birthday and I was alone. It was getting
late, the clock on the wall read 11:20 pm. I had been
waiting for a couple of friends to show up...but they
were late, so I knew we wouldn't be going anywhere.
I decided I would get changed into some work clothes
and head downtown hoping to make some money, then
go out and party. I just didn't want to be alone that
night. I put on my makeup and fixed my hair, all the

while hoping that my skirt was short enough so I could
catch quick. I didn't relish standing out there all night. I
was approached and we agreed to the fee. I charged ex-
tra to go out to his place. I wasn't being very cautious.
After we arrived I refused to do anything until I got my
money. Well...we were in his mobile home and he sat
in front of the door holding a knife. He just kept say-
ing that I couldn't leave without performing. I weighed
about 100 pounds soaking wet at the time. So after a
few hours (actually about 45 minutes) I just said, "If
you are going to use the knife, use it. If it's my time
to go...otherwise, I'm going right past you and out the
door." I called his bluff and was able to leave. I hitched
and walked all the way home from Thetis Lake to the
corner of Esquimalt and Head. When I got home my
friends were there. They had been waiting a long time
for me to get home.
> **Deb**

A sex worker friend of mine and I sat down one night
and figured out how many tricks we'd had in our
illustrious careers as street sex trade workers. We came
up with about 10,000 each, so anyone who says there
aren't very many men out there buying sex are just
wrong.
> **Megan**

What if the interviewer of the job I'm applying for is a trick I've seen? Before I met my birth father I was terrified that he would be a trick I'd seen at a motel! I figured that at least the ice would be broken!

> *Ally*

PIMPS: Stop...It Hurts

I had found myself at sixteen in a Vancouver bar, the Yale on Cecil, trying desperately to look at least nineteen with a man who had battered and forced women stronger than I onto the street. But this had eluded him. Be it circumstances or otherwise, he hadn't hit me yet. All of a sudden I felt groggy and I knew I hadn't drunk that much. I somehow managed not to be put out once again. But the next day we were back at the same bar. I remember feeling a pain in my arm. I looked and there was bruising and a pinprick. Once I was drugged, he drugged me some more, perhaps to the point of overdose. Frankly, I don't remember.

I got angry about this invasion, this atrocity, so he kicked me across the bar with his Daytons. He hit me repeatedly. I ran. I got away and got back to Victoria. I later found out that there had been someone watching my legacy unfold and took a quiet yet brave stand. He took the wiring out of the guy's truck so that I could

get away. I never did end up working for that son of a bitch.

> *Lisa*

She was an innocent seventeen-year-old girl from Medicine Hat. She met a man who manipulated her to sell her body. She prostituted for a couple of years – then got pregnant. She worked all during her pregnancy, right up until six days before her baby was born. The baby was born on Remembrance Day. She named him Brandon. Tragically little Brandon died from SIDS (crib death). Soon after, she started using drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of losing her baby Brandon. Her partner (pimp) cruelly blamed her for the loss of baby Brandon. The pimp went as far as accusing her of murdering her baby.

> *Donna*

One of my pimps encouraged me to go to University. I realize now that this was so he would know where to find me and so I would have something to lose. Sure kept me in one place and relatively sober for a long time. Besides, he was a well-educated man himself. That surprises some people, as if there were some part of university that instills moral fibre. I tell you, if there is, a lot of us were sick that day.

> *Gwen*

He walked in. I could cut the tension with a knife. He was angry with me. I hadn't obeyed his orders. I made a decision for myself. That was forbidden. I had cocaine courage. I stood my ground no matter what he said I wouldn't back down. He hit me. It hurt but I laughed and begged for more. He gave it to me several more times. I didn't stop asking for it until I was winded with a roundhouse to my back ribs. They cracked. I didn't know it yet. Somebody dialed 911. They must have heard me scream. Before I knew it I was hauled off to jail. I went just 'cause they couldn't make me talk. City cells aren't any fun. I fell asleep but woke up a couple hours later in absolute agony. I'd never felt anything like it. Off to the hospital I went to be examined and X-rayed. I was relieved to be away from my cell, even under these circumstances. Back to the cell until morning. Then court cells. Could my life get any worse? Let out on bail with a trafficking charge, only thing to do was wait for trial.

> *Sarah-Maria*

The purple freedom fan came into my life about eight or nine years ago. I bought it on the day I was going to court against my pimps. A man and a woman, they'd been together most her life. They had a small boy, his birth a coke induced one. Of all days not to get high, I really don't know why I picked that day. Of all

days. I was so very scared. I didn't even bring pills in my purse, because I had no idea what to expect at the courthouse. Would they look in my purse, and judge me from its contents? I thought they might.

A cop I'd never met before picked me up in a beige, newer-model car. He was a tall man and spoke in a soothing voice. I'm sure he gave me some reassuring words. He'd been through this before. I hadn't. There were two main cops I'd dealt with, Bob White and Jim Maitland. A few others came and went briefly during the time. Knowing what I know now, having my head clear, there was so much I had no idea how to articulate then, so I left parts out.

Jim was older, about to retire. I was his last case. Bob had been in the business for years as well. Double digit years. He had a hardened and sarcastic face. He was a rather large man. Beard and glasses, salt & pepper hair. He was the one who floored me when he said, just as they were about to leave my apartment "...and when we go to court...", because that was never my intention. Court? That was **never, never** part of any deal. **Never.** Bob was the one who dismissed what fears I could express by telling me that no pimps ever really hurt their working girl. But they'd just told me awful stories other girls went through. And later, they learned that indeed, he was the guy who cut a girl's teeth out in Calgary. I did have his name right.

Bob told me that court was all about hurrying up to wait. And wait we did. We sat beside each other on a hard orange bench, close to a cafeteria. We sat and waited. I was dying inside. Simply dying. Bob didn't talk much at all. Small talk ended after about ten minutes. He sat sort of slouched, with his arms across his chest, and looked sarcastically up from his glasses at all the people. I got the feeling he'd seen it all, and seen way too much of it. Maybe it was him who should have been him retiring. But, I could be completely wrong. Why couldn't I have got the cop with the soothing voice?

She made a point of walking by us, ever so slowly, to let her presence be known. She sprayed her perfume in the bathroom before I went in there. I'm sure the walls were dripping with it.

Lunch came and went. Jim, Bob and I went to a seedy restaurant not far from the courthouse. When it was my time to order, I kept changing small details – tuna sandwich, toasted with lettuce. Oh no, actually not toasted, and with alfalfa sprouts please. Actually, could you add cucumbers? I changed my order about four times. It was just that I was so nervous! I could feel Jim and Bob looking at each other while I tried to simply place an order. I got a really bad feeling from that look. During our brief lunch, they talked shoptalk. Different judges, how about that prosecutor, that law-

yer... I asked them the name of the Judge in my case. "Your Honor" was my stern answer, and nothing more. I felt that look again. I got a really bad feeling about that look.

It was back at the courthouse in the afternoon when I really started to regret not having any drugs with me, and not having taken any earlier. Finally, we went upstairs. My day in court was to begin. I was to wait in a small, narrow room with a table in it. Jim had a large box with him. He approached me and explained that he would go into the courtroom first and talk, and then I would be called in. And yes, they would be right there. I would be face to face with them. Jim said he would take close to an hour. My heart skipped a beat when he came back not five minutes later. This cannot be good, I was thinking.

He pleaded guilty, and she got a stay. He was to be deported, a.s.a.p. They turned to the guy from Revenue Canada, and told him he'd better move quickly, because she was sure to follow him. He did really did run out of the building fast. Not long after that, I had to go to Revenue Canada and explain the books and procedures that were used.

"You mean it's over?" I asked, in absolute astonishment. Yes, Jim said, that was it. "You're free to go now," he said with a warm smile on his face. Small talk was exchanged, hands were shaken, and it was time

for me to go. I was bursting inside. We turned to go towards the elevator, and she went in it, and held the door open. Jim very kindly asked me if I wanted to go in that car or another one. Bob White made some comment—to the effect of “Go in that elevator, face her...” I opted for the other car.

I walked out of the courtroom on one of the highest highs ever. I had a smile ingrained in my face. There was nothing I could do about it. The world would simply have to put up with my smile. It was over. I was alive, for now, for today. I decided to walk, just walk. I hadn't done that in two and a half years. Just walked, knowing that today, I'm pretty sure I'm going to be okay. I kept hugging myself and I was feeling incredibly exuberant. In the window of one place I walked by a beautiful purple fan caught my eye. It had a gorgeous peaceful scene painted on it with a waterfall, a bridge leading to a gazebo, a warm shining sun, blues and yellows all blended with the purple, simply gorgeous. I still have that fan. It's been through a lot since then. It could write stories of its own.

> *Ally*

I'M TALKING TO YOU:

Please Listen To Me and Then Believe Me

You will not be able to protect yourself or your children by reading these words. They are a past, they have a past. There is no rewind, you cannot play it again. You cannot cram for it, you cannot study it. You cannot prevent it. This is my life, my impression. You cannot eat it and be filled. You cannot mold it into ugliness or beauty. This is not your experience or your child's. This is not your daughter or your husband. You are only and importantly the third dimension. Your role is to feel the textures of my world. To experience the reality of someone else's life, of my life. You are integral to your own experience. You have a choice. You can be a tourist or a pilgrim. Observe or act, but assume nothing. This life is not yours.

> *Barb*

When you can't understand why a woman can't leave the sex trade, or why she goes back or why she can't just get a job, I want you to remember her life has not been like yours. I want you to remember your experiences are as foreign to her as hers are to you. She can no more become a bureaucrat tomorrow than you can become a sexually exploited youth tonight.

> *Gwen*

how much was taken from me without a second
thought
I owned nothing
I did not own my body
I did not own my chances
I was the girl who lived inside a small corner of herself
I was the girl who got lost along the way
who disappeared but no one noticed
I was the girl with the purple bruises
I was the girl with a sore vagina
I was the four-year-old who dreamed of ways to kill
herself
how much was taken from me, how much was never
given
how much was taken from me without a second
thought
I did not warrant a second thought, a first
I did not stop wanting
I did not stop hoping
I was the girl who smiled for the camera
I was the naked child in the photo, smiling
I was the child who did not give up
I was the girl who got beat up at school for being a liar
I was the girl who people felt uncomfortable around
I was the girl who had big feet and big breasts and took
up space that did not belong to her

how much was taken from me, without a second
thought
I did not own my choices
I did not own a voice
I was the woman who fucked strangers for relief
I was the woman injecting herself in a bathroom
I was the woman who had her head kicked in
how much was taken from me, how much was never
given
how much did I give away
I did not believe I belonged
I did not think I would live
I did not mean to survive
I did not give up
I did not stop hoping
> *hermione magdelene*

COMING TO PEERS:

Now That I'm Going To Live It's Safe To Have Dreams Again

My first time at PEERS I was skeptical. Who's gonna help prostitutes? Something run by the government? However as time passed I was told about the RISE Program, a life skills course. I completed it and graduated. There's one-on-one counseling, a resource room, computers which I still use on a drop-in basis. Most of all, people cared about me when I couldn't care about myself.

> *Leah*

Anger management? She laughed out loud. Why the hell did she have to take anger management? Stupid anger management, stupid judge, what does he know anyway?

She climbed the stairs thinking to herself that she had to do this, so she was going to do what she needed to do and get out of there. She reluctantly opened the door to see a room full of smiling kind faced people. "How friggin' cheesy is this?" she thought. "What the hell do these people have to be so happy about?"

She bit her tongue and took a seat in the circle of women. They were all so different from one another. Check in? Check out? I feel this, I feel that? Oh God,

she thought I'm going to throw up in the middle of this circle. I have nothing in common with any of these people, and all of this emotional crap is so annoying. I've got better things to do with my precious time. Fuck it! She stood up in such a hurry that she knocked over her chair. "I don't need this. This is bullshit," she informed the curious and bewildered women who were staring at her. She walked out of that little room and slammed the door behind her. She laughed to herself as she made her way to the liquor store. She needed to relax after such an experience.

> *Michelle*

I first came to PEERS on the day I was to be interviewed for the RISE program. I didn't know what to expect. In fact, I could not have even articulated just what my needs or wants were. I was not ready to trust others or to allow myself to be vulnerable. What a relief it was to be told I didn't have to be drug free or have exited the trade. They would teach me about life skills, anger management and if I let them they would show me how to interact with others and set personal boundaries. They didn't make me any promises, just told me if I wanted to make changes that I could acquire some useful tools from the program. What I would have to contribute would be effort and honesty and participation.

The first time I basically just showed up—which was good for me—but I didn't really start to participate until the three-month program was almost over. I learned enough to know I wanted to take it again and really learn what I could.

> *Deb*

Yes, there is PEERS, and yes, PEERS helps women and men, but they could never touch me, as sometimes they will never touch others who could benefit from their help. That is another story how to help people that will not be opened, that will never trust enough to let a stranger, let alone a friend in. When memories and words are trapped in the subconscious, and the only way out is in the air that I breathe and exhale... Sometimes things are indescribable.

> *Ramona*

LOOKING BACK:

I Remember, I Don't Remember

I don't remember being born. I don't remember being wrapped in what I imagine, a soft pink blanket. I don't remember hearing the doctor say "It's a girl with ten fingers and ten toes." I don't remember being fragile. I don't remember what might have been said. I don't remember my mother or father gazing at their

newborn with complete love, astonished that they had created something (someone), their little miracle. I do remember the love I hear in my father's voice when he says, "I love you, Baby."

> *Lisa*

I remember laughing and being carefree. I remember the laughter of others before all the tears. I remember the pain of forgetfulness when losing myself. I remember everyone who loved me and all their conditions. Why the conditions, was I not good enough as I was? Why did I believe them and begin denying myself—a self I now long to know. I remember giving myself without honor and without consent. I remember wishing I would die so I could be one with God. I remember being filled with fear as I tried to change. I remember giving up because I believed all the lies of past failures and people who told me I was crazy. I remember screaming for help and no-one answering. I remember loving others more than myself, and allowing them to disrespect and violate me. I remember living up to everyone's doubts. I remember being alone in my despair. I remember writing my thoughts. I remember forgetting to feel. I remember trying to fit in no matter the cost. I remember changing my mind and deciding I'm worth it. I REMEMBER WHO I AM.

> *Sarah-Maria*

I don't remember most of my childhood.
I don't remember the past.
I don't remember being any which way.
I don't remember to water my plants all the time.
I don't remember phone numbers very well.
I don't remember to turn everything out at night.
I don't remember to always return calls.
I don't remember the last time I relaxed.
I don't remember most people I meet.
I don't remember the last time I went to a show.
I don't remember not feeling anything.
I don't remember most of my depression.
I don't remember the things I've done.
I don't remember the cold nights.
I don't remember the money.

> *Shelley*

I remember when all was ahead of me. When I was blissfully ignorant of all the suffering and loneliness that were in store for me. I remember the sunny days of playing, unaware, not even thinking of things to come. I remember the slam of the door and the sound of the lock. I remember the innocent joys of youth. I remember ports of adolescence, some of it hazy but mostly the good – to be carefree, no concerns about tomorrow. Now it is tomorrow and it's good to remember.

40 > *Graham*

AFTER THE LIFE:

My Dream Is To Heal

I wandered for a long time, walking the streets. Day-time, nighttime, feeling lonely, aged, abused, dirty, unwanted. Asking myself why no-one seems to see the girl beneath the mask laughing on the outside, crying and screaming in pain on the inside...so afraid I'm losing my soul. What will happen to me, the real me, the sad, scared me? Will I ever be able to find my way back? Back down a thousand alleys, through a thousand hotels, bars and cars? Who have I become?

> *Deb*

The worst moment with drugs was not when I realized how badly I behaved when I was on drugs, how bitchy I got without it, or what I would do to get it. It was the realization that nothing could make me feel as good as a perfect dose of heroin – not sex, not laughter, not loving or hating, nothing else had the ability to numb me out or make me wary when I was frozen. Frozen is how I felt, stuck with the worst form of addiction. I loved my drug and I functioned better with it than without it. So in a moment of clarity when I realized that this was so wrong, that I had become so empty that it wasn't the drugs necessarily but that I could not stand the shit that was in my head. That be-

ing alone with myself was torture and that I needed to learn how to change my perception—how I viewed the world—and I had to learn to forgive myself and let go of my bullshit.

In a moment of clarity, I realized that this was so wrong and that I had become so empty. I could not stand the shit that was going on in my head. That being alone with myself was torture. I needed to learn how to change my perception, how I viewed the world, and I had to learn to forgive myself and let go of my bullshit. I am still struggling with this.

> *Lisa*

I feel as though I was robbed of my sense of honor at a young age. Once it was gone I continually reinforced my feelings of violation and self-hate. I went into self-destruct mode. I am now involved in NA, therapy, counseling, and morning educational group among other things to help heal the destruction inflicted to my sense of honor.

I am just now beginning to develop a personal code of honor. I think of self-respect as well as respect for others, honesty, do no harm to self or others, and to continually learn and grow mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Also, to be available to your family.

> *Leah*

Today I feel lonely. This is a time of struggle for me. Tomorrow will be the first day of May, the middle of spring. Perhaps I expect too much. I don't know. Since leaving my daughter and son-in-law, I feel the financial pressure due to my increase in rent. I'm tired, so tired of poverty. Scraping to get by day to day. I've got to find some way to earn a few extra dollars to make my life bearable. I am not a "money hungry" person by any means, but I do need a couple of dollars—just to get by.

> *Carol*

The thought of being what I call being completely alone is terrifying to me. No music, no noise, no telephone, no neighbors, no computer, no friends. I cannot stand to be alone. Even when working on the streets until early hours of the morning I would feel alone but always knew I wasn't. I suppose that was one reason why I started using drugs—so I would never have to be alone. I would always have that "friend" in my pocket or at least at home waiting for me. To this day I even find it difficult to just sit with myself, reading, writing or doing any other activity without music, TV or some other distraction. Maybe others would think that this is because I just don't like the person I am. I feel that it is just a constant fear of being alone, nothing more, nothing less. I believe that when I am ready to explore the "issue" of being alone, I will. Until

then I plan to play loud music, and do as many things as I can to satisfy myself.

> **Jason**

Would a peaceful bird of nature cry in the night?

Would a cat sit like a dog?

Would you love to walk along these streets alone?

Would you ever see love in this cruel-cold world?

> **Shelley**

The only one. I was just thinking last night—middle of the night, too hot, too cold, blanket too heavy and where is that cat? I was thinking I'm the only one. The only one what? The only one here? Not so: one child, three cats, three fish and a shark. The only one awake? Well, apparently. What other only one am I? The only one who ever sold drugs, or bought them or used them. The only one who ever sold her ass. The only one of those? Hardly. The only adult

in my family? Depends on what you call a family. But really, no. The only one anxious and struggling and tired and wide awake at 4 am? (God damn 4 am anyway) But I really doubt that too. In fact, I bet I could call someone right now who feels just the same as I do right now. Still, I'm the only one, and have I got things to worry about, piled up there and hurting in my stomach. And I'm the only one, the only one I have to rely on.

> **Gwen**

Since I left the trade
I've had a job.
I've had a boyfriend.

Since I left the trade
One of my cats died.
My Harbour Girl has passed.

A part of myself has died,
Since I left the trade.

Since I left the trade,
I've been yelled at,

really bad,
twice.
And since I left the trade,
I've yelled at others,
really bad,
three times.

Since I left the trade
I've turned a trick
or two.

And since I left the trade
I drink everyday.
I drink just enough,
To be okay

No one knows *that*
about me.

I've read,
seen documentaries,
watched foreign movies and TV.
I love to wonder
Since I left the trade.

I surfed the net,
written e-mails,

a proposal,
and I wrote a poem.
I've written things down,
Since I left the trade.

I've taken school courses.
and I self medicate.
I had to pay income tax,
Since I left the trade.

I went to a baseball game this
summer
but I learned about myself
instead.

I have *the* worst time saying no.

I think I'm afraid of men
and crosswalks now too,
Since I left the trade.

No one has hit me
there have been no hands,
around my neck.

I did my first collage
and took it from there.

I've owned computers.
I've had to adjust.
I have to adjust.

I haven't quite found
my tongue yet.
Since I left the trade.

I want to go to school.
I started smoking pot,
and taking Percocet.

I've had bad nightmares
and written some things down.
It gets better.
I take anti-depressants now.
I've been to a chiropractor.
I've taken up beading.
I made soup for the first time.
and a Caesar Salad.
I bought my first avocado.

I love my friends.
They chose me,
they just kept trying

I went downhill skiing.
we stayed in a condo
and had a dandy time.

And I don't really remember
the first few years.

I keep written, picture and other
journals
all around.
I'm leaving a trace of me,
Since I left the trade.

I miss my Harbour Girl.
I can't seem
to part with her ashes.

I'm scared to be strong
When it matters the most
Since I left the trade.

I spoke to my mother,
She doesn't want to talk to me.
She won't open the letter
I sent her with pictures of me.
Then I had pneumonia.
and my friend took me shopping

so I'd have food
while she was away.

I poked through that fence.
And left it far behind.
Sometimes,
I fear,
it may not be over yet.

My addictions
are just different ones now.

I went camping.
I accidentally ate some ants
and
something bit my face.

I've held my cats *soooo* tight.

I don't expect to live long.
I can't grasp future time
or the consequences.

I don't want to talk about it.

I picked up a Sailor
just for fun.

I've given it away for free.
And made some jewelry too.

I thought I was immune to *that*.
But there's been a snowstorm
here in Victoria.
It's hailed and it's rained.

I've painted hundreds of petals
now
For about five years,
I can't stop
painting petals.

I've felt like such a failure.
I haven't felt right.
Didn't I tell you that?

My friend had a baby
and I love him *soooooo* much.
I love the child.

I didn't do the right thing
When we made jam
and picked flowers at night.
Then I agreed I'd answer the

phone.

I thought I was immune to *that*
you see.
I am not immune I see.
I stopped dying my hair.
I'm in my 30's now and my hair
is grey.
I think I'm different now.
I'm always a bit nervous.
Sometimes I die inside.
Sometimes it's worse.

I went back to treatment.
the word sounds so funny to me,
when I think
of what treatment is.

Myers-Briggs did the same
after 12 years.
but I still don't know
what I want to do.
I thought I was doing it.
I really did.

And then,
Alas,

I surprise myself.

I keep all my pills
in a giant bowl
in the kitchen cupboard
Since I left the trade.

I actually got a VISA!
And an STD.
and pregnant.

I've taken lots of pictures.
Those should stay in my family.
Those should go to my Mom I
guess.

I don't welcome reminders.
Since I left the trade.
And I got addicted to Percocet.

No one knows *that*
about me either.

And,
I drank methadone for a while,
for fun.
Nobody knows *that*.

Except for the one who gave it to
me.

I wouldn't mind talking about it,
Talking about it all.

I need a lot of sleep
and things have to be
a certain way.

I never could control
when I sleep.
I could hide it well.

I want to know how it all started.
Maybe.

I don't know what to do.
I know it is something.
I know
I know little.

I can't tell you everything.

For the longest time
I couldn't even feel
anything

for anyone.
I couldn't feel a thing
for another human being.

I want to show you this world.
It's just that it takes a while
and I get nervous.

I want to tell you all about it.
But I won't tell you anything.
Not anything at all.

> *Ally*

IN A PERFECT WORLD:

I would secretly....love to be me

Already so many years of being nice twist in my guts
like a corkscrew.

How many more pats on the head before the helix
reaches my throat?

> *Gwen*

In a perfect world I would secretly love to be...
a person without shame, living in perfect harmony
with nature. A living breathing entity of light and tran-
quility. A life without guilt, without despair, hunger, or
hate. To be at peace with the world and myself.

> *Lisa*

Iam like a weeping willow tree swaying in the wind.
My roots grow deep in rich dark earth while my
branches bend to kiss the dark green grass. As a hum-
mingbird flits overhead, hear the sounds of a harp play-
ing the song of freedom.

> *Deb*

I am loud with fear
I am spinning around love,
Like a soulful wind
My roots have given birth
To a beautiful oak tree

> *Sarah-Maria*



TRANSCRIPTION OF STORIES CD:

I've Been Travelling Many New Roads and I still Believe in Tomorrow

(Sound recording produced by Anna Isaacs and transcribed by Kim McKay)

Track 1

I've been invited to talk about my experience in the sex trade, whatever that looks like to me. And I sat and I thought about it, as I looked out my window here, and I saw the curb and I pictured myself standing there. And you, you mainstream people, you judged me. You pulled your kids away from me. You didn't want to know who I was, you didn't ask who I was. You didn't want to know. You didn't ask me if I needed anything, if I was ok, you didn't ask me if I thought I was going to be alive at the end of the night. Some of you threw balloons, water balloons. Some of you threw pennies. When men would pull up in their cars they would barter with me over how much they thought I was worth. And all of the sudden I was a commodity, and I had to sell myself because I needed the money. People judge what they don't know. They think I just ended up there, just like that. They don't think about the eight-year-old, who was in school, or the eleven-year-old, or the twelve-year-old that I was, blowing out candles on a birthday cake, sitting with my family. All you saw was the prostitute. You thought I was dirty, disease-infected, addicted, and I was none of the above. I was a woman who was just trying to make some money, because I thought it

was a way of life, because that's what you taught me. That's what you taught me that it was about. This is what I had to do, because it was all I knew. You think it's a problem and if it's in your community, then your community must be the ghetto. So you push us out, to unknown areas, and you say, there's no sexually exploited youth on our street, there is none in Victoria. I don't see any prostitution, so there is none. You don't know where we are, unless you want to buy sex from us, then it's real easy.

Track 2

Ok, I'm just going to say how I got into the trade. I was sixteen-years-old and I was working as a live-in babysitter. The woman I babysat for was a stripper who worked at a very exclusive club in Vancouver at the time. It started when I was pregnant; she had a regular that paid \$100 to look at my bellybutton. And I was so embarrassed, I didn't want to lift my top, and it was just to show a bellybutton. I was very inverted. I did it though. Then it got a littler easier—she'd take me to the hairdresser, she got me all dolled up and dressed up. I think the age was 21 then, but the people who owned this club took me under their wing. So I only had to date their clients, didn't have to pay anybody, no pimps, no anything. This woman would sell me to her regulars, but then she kicked me out because her regulars wanted me instead of her, because I was younger or something. That was my introduction. I continued going to the nightclub for about two years. They gave me all the good customers because I didn't rip them off, I was very honest, very polite, so I got exclusive business for years.

Track 3

There was one close call I had. A guy from Alberta, one of those kind of guys who wants to really get his money's worth down to the fucking minute. It had almost been an hour, and I had somebody spotting for me. It's not like I had a way to call them and let them know I was going to be any longer, so if someone wanted to pay for an extra hour, I wasn't willing to do that, because this person wouldn't know whether I was alive or tied up in a basement somewhere. So we were at a hotel on the Gorge, and it was like five minutes to the time I had to be back at this spot before my friend was going to call the cops. And I started getting dressed and he's going hey, hey, hey, there's still five minutes left, I paid for an hour. And I'm going, buddy, you got your rocks off, what do you want from me, you know? I tried handling him calmly, and then he came at me. I don't remember what I did. I remember that I never took my boots off, so no matter what, if I was buck-naked, I could run. I had the money in my boot, jammed in my boot, that's the first place it goes, and it's always on me. And I just went, you're not getting your money back, and if you come any closer I'll start screaming fire. He started to back away. And then he tried pulling this, well, I'll just call the cops and tell them you're here. I'm like, go for it, buddy, I'll tell them exactly what we just did, I'll give them explicit details if you want. As if that was going to scare me. He thought he could con his way into getting his money back or get extra time from me. So I thought, whatever, you've got palms, you're still horny, you're on your own. Work it out. And my friend was really, really mad and he wanted to go back and

slash this guy's truck tires, and I know that's kind of like a silly thing to do and it's passive aggressive and all that crap, but man, I would have loved to have gone back and slashed his tires. Just fantasizing about going there and slashing up his tires—because I remember him saying he had to go and drive back to Alberta the next morning, so he would have been hooped. He would have had to buy brand new tires. It would have been kind of cool to have done that, but it never did happen. Most of my experiences were with middle-aged, lonely, I'm assuming married, men that were just not happy, not getting it at home, whatever. They didn't really want to hurt anybody, but they were just lonely. They would just need someone to talk to, or need someone to just satisfy them, get their cheap thrills. That's what I was there for, I provided that service, and I think I did a pretty good job at it.

Track 4

I was about fifteen when I left home. My mom was an alcoholic and she used to beat on me quite a bit, and when I got fed up with it enough I left home. I lived on the street for a couple of years, in and out of group homes, receiving homes. Then my friend came up to me one day and wanted to go to Calgary, so I decided to hitchhike to Calgary. So there I am with nothing in Calgary, and I meet this big black guy. We'll call him Bruce. So I stayed with Bruce for about five years. He used to beat on me. He beat on me so bad that he would send me to the hospital. We became very addicted to cocaine. I had a couple of kids: one now is nine, one's eight now. Then I gave Bruce a plane ticket and basically told him to leave, be-

cause we got into the last fight, which was the *last* fight, and he hit me. And he said, see, it doesn't even faze you anymore. And I said, why should it, you've been doing it for five years, why should it faze me anymore? I bought him a plane ticket and sent him on the next plane out. I lost both those children. I continued on with my life and I met this other guy, and we were just this Bonnie and Clyde kind of duo, and doing all kinds of bad shit.

Track 5

As a teenager, I was back and forth from home a lot because I ran away. Because of that, I met a lot of the street people, pimps, and other sex trade workers—at that time I wasn't a sex trade worker though. At this point I was back at home with my parents, and they went away for the weekend. So I went to stay with one of my friends, who at that time was working. And I thought hey, why not? I'll go with her. So, I went with her, and I think I made three hundred dollars that night, from one date, and then I went to the bar, and I partied, and then the next day I went to the mall, and I shopped. After I got home from the mall, the guy from the night before phoned me and came back and saw me again, so I had more money, so it was seeming pretty good to me. So, from there it's history. Ten years later, here I am.

Track 6

So I'm twenty-three, I live here in Victoria, and have most of my life. I got in the sex trade, if you consider exotic dancing the sex trade, when I was eighteen. I first started exotic dancing when someone mentioned it to me, a friend that I worked

with. We both were doing this government funded acting program here in Victoria and I was dating this guy at the time who was really, really pushing me to move to Vancouver. He claimed that there lay his motivation to become employed. That was his reason for being unemployed, that Victoria was just the wrong city for him. So if we moved to Vancouver, everything would be great and our relationship would just blossom and he would have work and I wouldn't be supporting him. That was a big fat lie. So, knowing I had these plans to move to Vancouver, I was a little bit nervous about finances, and my friend was like, you know, I used to have a girlfriend and she's an exotic dancer. My friend basically gave me the lowdown that you don't have to look a certain way when you first start out. I was about the size that I am now, and I was fairly in shape, but I don't think I look like your stereotypical stripper, so the idea never even crossed my mind. And he was insisting, no, no, you start out, and basically you're fresh meat and they'll take you and you get fit from doing it, and you can shape your look and your image. The idea seemed nuts when he first said something about it, but the idea never left my mind, I was like, ok, maybe it's good money. It was obviously the money that I was drawn to. And one day, after moving to Vancouver, and being there for a while, and trying to clean up—I think I was doing mostly heroin at the time—I had been clean for about a week, got on the methadone program and I needed a job. So why not try this stripping thing? I went to the Cecil Hotel, and I just walked in there, totally terrified, went to the front desk and said, who do I talk to about a job? And they pointed to this room with these tinted win-

dows and these big black velvety curtains and they were like, that's the VIP lounge, and go in there and talk to a woman named Moiette. She was this really, really hot-blooded, kind of intimidating Jamaican woman, and I walked right up to her and said, I'm here about a job. She just basically looked me up and down and went, turn around. So I turned around and she looked at my body and was like ok, be here eight o'clock sharp, tomorrow night. No rehearsal, no seeing if I had any skills, she didn't ask me any questions, she just looked at me and said, you're hired. So, the next day, after a few tequila shooters, and chewing my nails down to nothing, I went up there and did it, and it just got easier and easier, and I actually really liked it. It was pretty empowering for me to do that. And my family got to be a little more accepting—well I shouldn't say my whole family. My mom was actually ok with it, I was pretty honest with her, and I did stay off drugs while I was doing that.

Track 7

I guess the first time I was ever in the trade was for a very short while. I was about fifteen, sixteen years old and I didn't really know what it was, or what it meant, I just knew my friends were doing it, so I went along with them. It didn't last long. When I entered the trade as an adult, I was wired to drugs, I had an abusive partner who went to jail and had people that he owed money to, so they came after me. One goes away, the other one owes. They told me that I had to go out and work, or I'd get beat up, or he'd get beat up, so I figured I'd just go to work. I never wound up paying them

anyway. I said, ok, I'll just go buy more drugs. The first time I turned a date, I cried once and never cried again and felt dirty. I continued that for about a year and a half, using more and more. My addiction really progressed because of my working the trade—the dirty shame feelings, the guilt that goes along with it, the misconceptions that I had. Time on the street and in the sex trade wasn't nice, it wasn't pretty, and I didn't glorify the money either, I just shot it all in my veins. I didn't hang around nice people. That's how I got into the trade. And how I exited. Well, I died in the hospital and they shipped me to Victoria. That's how I found here, PEERS, in a recovery house, not knowing what to do. And I can honestly say I like being on this side of the fence much better. I don't like the other side.

Track 8

So I'm working for this escort agency, under an assumed name of course. Let's say my stage name is Angie. So this gentleman calls the agency, he's a high-powered, real executive attorney, who's really well known in the city I'm working out of. Always on TV, everyone knows who he is. And he calls for a girl, so they warn me beforehand going into this call what to expect. But I'm thinking, this can't be real, I mean I've seen this guy and he just doesn't strike me as this type of person. So I go down to this sleazy, cheap-bag motel, because he doesn't want to be seen anywhere that the public might see him. I'm dressed in my fancy-dancy little ho clothes, and I knock on the door and this thing answers the door, I'm not sure what he is, a woman or a man. And

he's got lingerie that's nicer than the lingerie I own, I mean Frederick's of Hollywood. And his breasts are pushed through his bra with his little nipples showing and he's got a big boa around his neck and he comes to the door in a really feminine way and says, come on in, my treat, my name's Michelle, and I'm here to be your slave. So I think, this is too unbelievable. So we go in, and we're sitting there and the guy offers me some Grand Marnier and he proceeds to put on a tape, and he starts dancing. Like the best stripper I've ever met, he's dancing, he wants to be my love slave, he doesn't want anything sexual except to wash my feet. So he's dancing around, his name's Michelle, he's washing my feet, saying, how can I be your slave, oh mistress, what can I do for you today? So this goes on for about an hour, and I'm cracking up, and I'm going into the bathroom trying not to laugh, because I feel like I'm in a scene from a movie. So this session ends, he's satisfied, I'm more than satisfied because I've made my quota and then some. He does pay well. After the session's over, he puts back on his professional silk business suit, gets his briefcase, shoves all his Frederick's of Hollywood lingerie into the briefcase. He slaps a cheque down, and we sit down on the end of the bed and he proceeds to tell me about his beautiful wife and charming children. And that was one of my many experiences, in the trade, of fifteen years.

Track 9

I was older than most people when I got into this. I was well into my twenties. However, I never really looked my age. I had a pretty good upbringing. I basically have no major com-

plaints, which is probably what differentiates me from other people who are in the trade. That said, I think it's becoming much more common to have women such as myself in the trade, coming from middle/upper class homes, no abuse in my family, no drug issues, no mental health issues, just your regular suburban family. I was working in an agency for four years, and then I worked independent for a year. The agency ran a pretty clean house, meaning that if you were on drugs, you were fired. A lot of the girls were working their way through university, one girl in particular was going to be a brain surgeon. I had one girl who just this year is finishing up her seventh year of university to be a schoolteacher. I think that in this day and age sex has become as common as any everyday thing, like doing your dishes, or any sort of chore. I think when the media is using sex to sell bubble gum to your child at the age of three it sends a very clear message that sex is ok, sex is just part of everything we do, and it devalues it immensely. When you don't put importance on something as important as sex or really know what it is meant to be, it is a whole lot easier to go into a situation and be able to use it to your benefit and use it as a profit situation where you make money. Once you get into it you start to see how much money you can actually make, and if you're smart about it, you can do pretty good for yourself. And there starts the vicious cycle. For myself it was a temporary measure, being a single mom on welfare and really feeling like I had no other resources. Desperate times are cause for desperate measures, and that's where I ended up. This temporary thing took five years of my life, until I was just so completely bored. I was very fortunate,

I never had a bad date. I was smart about it too: I was never high, I was always straight when I was in a situation. And I think that has a bit to do with the fact that we live where we live, and the majority of our clientele were tourists, American tourists. At the time the exchange on the dollar was so good it was such a good deal for them, which meant you spent a lot of time in the nice hotels, not a sleazy sort of thing. And they certainly don't want to come to our country and get in any kind of trouble. It's basically something they want to do on vacation, have a good time, and do out of their hometown, for fear of somebody finding out, and leave. One interesting point is that it is extremely common to get calls in the summer—the summer months of course being the busiest because it is such a tourist city—from men requesting that the girl be sent to the room, and their wives are somehow involved. I've even gone into situations where the woman has been the one who has paid me, for the husband. Sometimes the women participate, sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's sort of a gift, for lack of a better term, to the husband. It's a strange situation, but it's one of those things where the longer you're in the trade, nothing really fazes you anymore.

Track 10

My experience in the sex trade gave me the survival skills to make it in your world, because I can go anywhere and know how to fit into your world. You couldn't survive my world because it's way too real for you. People always refer to the sex trade as the game. What they don't get is that life is a game. Life is full of bullshit and politics and guessing games,

proper terminology. It's not ok to tell people what I think about them, but it's ok for them to let me know what they think about me. Nobody sees the mother, or the daughter, or the sister; they see the prostitute. Society makes it hard to financially live in this world. You focus on us, and tell us we shouldn't do that, but you provide no options for us, no feasible options. You keep us marginalized. You took away my life, and you stripped me of my spirit and I got lost from who I was because with every trick I was somebody new. I spent eight hours with a very, very wealthy man who made me call him daddy and I had to resist his sexual advances and pretend he was my father. That's what you paid me for. That's who I became in that time. What you don't think about is, am I going to have a healthy relationship, am I ever going to be normal? Well you know what, I don't want to be normal. I don't want to be in your white bread world. I'd rather live in the bush with the animals, because they know what's best. You hurt our children, you hurt our women, you take away everything that they are. I remember I worked for an escort agency and I came in with a handful of money and I said I'm going to go out and buy myself a new dress, and the woman there looked at me and said, whoa, easy come, easy go. And I looked at her and I said, no, it wasn't easy. It's mentally draining. All you want to do is to try and please me, when you're having sex with me. That's what little of a man you are. You think I like it, you think I enjoy it. I hate it.

Track 11

The first couple of times I went out, I went out of the city

where I lived and after that I went in the city where I lived, because that's where all the working girls I knew worked. So one night I was out at work, and one of the girls asked me who I was, and I told her my name, and she says, oh, that's who this certain pimp was talking about. And I said what are you talking about? And she said to me, well this pimp came around and he told all of us girls—he was a really well respected pimp on this stroll—that you would be out here, but to leave you alone, not to bother you, but to just let you be. Which at that time I thought was really strange, because I was not with any pimp. I was by myself, didn't pay anyone except for the retail shops, and to this day I don't know why he did that.

Track 12

It was the relationship that I was in that was the root of the problems going on in my life and my feeling like I wouldn't be strong enough to be on my own. I think I was nineteen at that point, and the drugs crept back in; he started using crystal meth. It just all fell apart from there, I lost my job due to emotional stress and not being reliable, not showing up when I was supposed to. Then we lost our apartment, ended up on the street, and I wasn't getting the recovery that I needed. I was just staying clean and having fun not using drugs, making new friends, but I wasn't taking care of myself in a way that if something bad was to happen in my life, I would have the tools to not go back on drugs. Heroin haven is Vancouver. So, living in Vancouver and having a heroin addiction from the get go, that combination was just flirting with death all

over again. I got full-blown wired and came back here and haven't gone back since. From that point my working in the sex trade died down for at least a year until I turned my first trick here in Victoria. It was mostly to support my need for cocaine, which is what grew when I got here. My drug of choice was pretty much heroin, but I found it really difficult to find; cocaine was always really accessible, it was always the first thing you could find, the only thing I could find. So I resorted to using a lot of cocaine and I got addicted to it that way. So it was mostly to feed my habit. There were nights when I would go out and tell myself, ok, this time you're actually going to go out and make the money for what you need it for. Food, toiletries, rent. Food. And some nights, surprisingly enough, I'd make it home, barely making it home, not spending any money. But I knew if I had picked up that first hit I would have blown all the money that I had made on dope. So it was really that goal of making the money and just getting home and fighting that temptation, not giving into that urge of using because I knew I would blow all that money, and feel horrible about myself and it was just this vicious cycle.

Track 13

My overall impression of my five years there—I certainly learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about human sexuality in general. I learned a lot about men in general. If you're not involved with it, it's something that is very obscure, and something that will probably never ever touch your life, but once you're in it you start to understand what a billion dollar

industry it really is. There's a lot of people out there doing it. For every girl out there doing it there are who knows how many guys. My overall impression of it was that I had no regrets—it's not to say that I would influence other people to make the choices that I have made, or to say that it is a right thing to do or a wrong thing. But I certainly understand why women, or men for that matter, why anybody gets involved with it, and why they stay. I was very fortunate with the fact that I never developed an addiction because of it. Certainly the opportunity was there, and maybe it had a lot to do with the fact that I was older, I was more responsible, I had a young child at home and my focus was that. I got out when an opportunity presented itself, and I jumped on it. I was so bored at the time. It becomes very redundant, and you're very much an actress, very much playing a role, and it's like playing the same scene over again and over again and over again, night after night in the same play. After a while it's pretty boring if you have a brain. My overall impression of it is that it wasn't a bad thing. Like I said, I did learn a lot from it. I don't want to go back. I do miss the money. That is, I'm sure, a huge issue for a lot of people. But I'm a better woman for it. So, I'm glad to be where I am, and I don't regret my experience, and I really feel that no matter where I go, it's a part of who I am. Although it's a very small piece of my life, it will always be a part of who I am. It's made me who I am today.

Track 14

You don't care if we live or if we die. And if we try to do better for ourselves then you want to profit off us. Make your-

selves look good—look what we're doing for the prostitutes, isn't it good? It doesn't come from your heart. It comes from your head and how it can fill your pocket book, and make you look better as a person. When I was fourteen the police used to drive us out to Thetis Lake and make us walk back into town. It was their way of getting us out of town for a while. You think you know the answers to the problems in my life, but you don't ask me what I need. You tell me. You think you know me but you don't, and you don't want to know me. You think prostitution's a bad thing, but your husbands are buying us for sex. You think it could never happen to you, but it's happening to you right now. You took away my life and my spirit. I'm going to take it back. I'm going to be the educated sex trade worker at the table, and nobody's going to know. And I'm going to have a voice for those who can't. I see you in your world, but you won't know who I am.

Track 15

I've got some regrets, but overall I'm pretty open about it—the fact that I've been in the sex trade. It's one of those things that people have a curiosity about, and we need to not be so hush-hush about it. I would like to see more people talking about it, being willing to ask more questions. I'd be more than happy to answer people's questions if they were curious. Most people's responses when I tell them I used to be a sex trade worker, is that they're just curious, and they ask me questions and stuff; I really don't think they're being judgmental. I think they're just curious. Don't get me wrong, it's not something I put on my resume, but...

***If you are trying to transform a brutalized society
into one where people can live in dignity and hope.
you begin with the empowering of the most powerless.
You build from the ground up.***

Adrienne Rich

Rich, A. (1994). "Going There and Being Here." *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. p. 158



- Depressed
- Happy
- Anger
- Fear
- Escape
- Sorrow & Pain & Grief

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