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THE
**BUTTERFLY
DIARIES** Volume 1

Four true stories of transformation told
by four New Zealand writers.

Raewyn Alexander
Henrietta Bollinger
Owen Bullock
Phoebe Wright

Foreword by **Mike King**
Edited by Miriam Larsen-Barr and Michelle Bolton

THE BUTTERFLY DIARIES

VOLUME 1

Edited by Miriam Larsen-Barr and Michelle Bolton



Pay It Forward

The Butterfly Diaries is free so people can get hold of it easily. When you finish with the book, instead of saving it away where no one can see it, please pass it on to someone else who might find it helpful.

The Butterfly Diaries, Volume 1

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The Butterfly Diaries was originally a free printed book and is now available as a free pdf e-book on the Engage Aotearoa website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | WHAKAMOEMITI

“Kei te whakamoemiti atu te manu meroiti nei ki ētahi o ana kaitautoko e whiu mai nei i ngā hua kāramuramu hei oranga mōna kia kaha ai tana koroki i runga i tōna pae.”

“This small bird is thanking some of its supporters who have tossed some karamū berries as sustenance so that its call on its perch will be loud.”

The Butterfly Diaries is an Engage Aotearoa project to make recovery stories easier to find and we are grateful to all of the partners and allies who have supported this vision to become a reality

The Butterfly Diaries would not exist without the brave people who shared their stories and the writers who worked for so long to write them so sensitively. We have been honoured to get to know each of these inspiring individuals throughout the process. We are deeply appreciative of the storytellers for entrusting us with their stories and the writers for trusting us with their creative work.

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SUPPORT SERVICES | RATONGA TAUTOKO



If the issues raised in this book get you thinking about yourself or someone you know, please reach out for support. You may find the support you need at the other end of one of these help lines.

1737 National Phone Counselling Service

Free phone 1737

Lifeline

Free phone: 0800 543 345

Outline

Free phone: 0800 OUTLINE or 0800 688 5463

Tautoko Suicide Helpline

Free phone: 0508 TAUTOKO or 0508 828 865

Youthline

Free phone: 0800376633

Free text: 234

Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

Your Local Crisis Team

Every community in New Zealand has a Crisis Team who are available to respond to people in a mental-health crisis. If you or someone you know is at risk of hurting themselves, call your local Crisis Team.

Emergency Services

If you or someone you know is underway with a suicide attempt, call 111 and ask for the Ambulance, or if weapons are involved, ask for the police. Keep in mind that in mental-health situations, the police are there to keep the person safe, not investigate them for anything. You can even call 111 from a cell phone that has no credit on it.

There are a range of services available in your community that can provide ongoing support.

Your Local GP

Your local GP doctor can refer you to the help you need if you tell them what you are going through. They can link you in with psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, support workers and the funded options.

The Community Resources Directory



Find contact details for sources of support and connection, including how to find your local Crisis Team, and how to access free therapy, in The Community Resources Directory on the Engage Aotearoa website.

The Coping Kete



Find over 150 different strategies for coping with distress and improving the moment in The Coping Kete on the Engage Aotearoa website.

www.engagenz.co.nz/copingkete



FOREWORD | WĀHINGA KŌRERO



By Mike King

Ambassador, Key to Life Charitable Trust

I learned the power of personal stories in 2008 on my first night hosting a talk back radio show. At the time I was six months into my recovery as a drug addict and alcoholic, seeing a psychologist and struggling to come to terms with my situation.

My problems began as a young boy with low self-esteem who struggled to make friends and spent every waking moment doubting himself. Conscious of the way I looked – a small kid with buck teeth, big ears, and a huge head – rather than exposing myself to the ridicule of others, I spent a lot of time alone talking myself through things, criticising myself so others wouldn't need to.

Then one day I discovered I could make people laugh and I immediately associated that laughter with being 'liked'. In my mind, if people laughed at my jokes that meant they liked me and for an insecure kid getting that approval meant the world.

For thirty years I battled with depression alone and, like most kiwi blokes, I lived in constant fear of people 'finding out' I was nuts. So I drank and did drugs to escape the relentless torment my inner demons would throw at me. Being the guy who made people laugh was the perfect cover.

On this particular night in 2008, I had given our listeners a number of topics to address and failed to get a single response to any of them. But rather than admit I had no callers on the lines (thus admitting I was a failure), I lied and said we had lots of people ready to give their opinions and I would get to them right after the break.

For the next three minutes I stared at an empty switch board praying someone would call. When that didn't eventuate I made a decision that changed my life. I told the truth.

I told the listeners that there were no callers waiting to come on the show and if they didn't start calling I would be forced to talk to the voices in my head, and that's exactly what I did. Once I started I couldn't stop. It was like I was exorcising

my demons as thirty years of shame, fear and self-loathing came spilling out of in a stream of unconscious thought.

It was one of the most liberating feelings I have ever experienced in my life and the more I talked, the more the boards lit up until all our lines were full. The response from the callers was nothing like I expected.

My whole life I had been led to believe that any man who talks about his problems publicly was weak and deserved nothing but scorn and derision. What I got was the exact opposite.

Not only was I getting calls from people thanking me for sharing my story, I received dozens of calls from people, even other blokes, who wanted to share their stories. In a short space of time we realised the power of sharing. Not only is it empowering to tell your story but it empowers those who hear it, it gives them the courage to speak up and say "I feel that way too".

Within these pages are the stories of those who have experienced many life issues. In being part of The Butterfly Diaries, they too have gone through the cathartic process of sharing their stories, offering their messages of hope, showing that you too can come through the other side and emerge a stronger person like they have.

I admire their strength and resolve and I know their stories will make a difference.

INTRODUCTION | KUPU ARATAKI



**By Miriam Larsen-Barr
Engage Aotearoa**

***“What the caterpillar calls the end of the world
the master calls a butterfly.”***

*~ Richard Bach**

Butterflies begin their lives as caterpillars, as larvae. They send a line out to the nearest support structures they can find, build a cocoon around themselves and then disintegrate in there. Once everything has fallen apart, the life inside the cocoon starts to put itself back together. It does not put itself back together piece by piece until it is a replica of what it was before. It evolves into something entirely new. This new form is fragile for a time as it stretches its wings. But ultimately, as the air catches on and the muscles are flexed, it becomes stronger and more beautiful than it was before, something that does not crawl, but can fly. Other writers have likened this transformation to many things, from the everyday process of growing up to the journey of recovery from psychosis. Coming through the experience of being suicidal also reads much like the diary of a butterfly’s transformation.

The Butterfly Diaries was officially born in December 2011, when we sent out a call for people who had recovered from the experience of being suicidal. But The Butterfly Diaries existed as an idea in the cocoon of my mind for months beforehand, although it did not yet have a name.

Suicide was all over the media in 2011. News stories quoted bereaved family members, stigma experts, coroners, politicians, teachers, mental-health experts and every now and then, someone who had been suicidal themselves. I wanted the ratio to be the other way around. To me, the most important experts were the people who had been there and survived it themselves. Encouraging people to talk openly about their experience of surviving being suicidal was a bit of a risky proposition, so I understood the hesitation – I didn’t want to cause bereaved supporters distress over things they wish they could go back and change. I didn’t want to give anyone ideas for how to make their own attempts or leave anyone feeling worse than they started. But I knew people with lived experience had important insights to add to the picture.

I wanted to create an opportunity for people to share what got them through – the ideas, supports and strategies that helped. I wanted those who are feeling suicidal now to be able to hear from people who have turned things around and see real life examples that provide little bridges to hope – support structures they can reach out and hold on to. I wanted the stories to be written creatively to lift them off the page in a way people would be willing to relate to.

I met Michelle Bolton at a poetry event that same year. After talking late into the night, I discovered Michelle, a fellow writer, shared my passion for suicide prevention. We had both found our way to this particular belly-fire through the fuel of our personal lives. Michelle, through losing more than one friend to completed suicide attempts and me through my own 'unsuccessful' suicide attempts and journey to recovery. I told her about my idea and she agreed to help make it happen. It was Michelle who first suggested calling the book 'The Butterfly Diaries'. The moment it flew from her mouth we both knew the project had found its name.

By early 2012, we had discovered six people who wanted to share their recovery stories and six creative writers to tell them, enough material for not one, but two books. The personal storytellers either took part in a face-to-face interview or filled out a written self-interview about their recovery journey. The notes from their interviews were then sent to one of the writers. Personal storytellers chose how they wanted their story to be told, so The Butterfly Diaries is a mixture of poetry, short story and essay. For over a year, we have been reviewing drafts with storytellers and making edits with writers to get the stories ready for the world. It has been a truly inspiring journey for all involved. The first four stories are published here in Volume 1.

These stories show that suicidal urges can affect anyone whether they are a successful PhD student like Mary was, a married, working father like Sean was or a struggling young person trying to deal with too much on their own, like Brad and Alice were. Each person's recovery story is unique to them. What suits one person, might not suit someone else. What The Butterfly Diaries storytellers have in common is that they committed themselves to finding the supports and strategies that suited them and they gave themselves time to strengthen their new wings. The Butterfly Diaries, Volume 1 shares how they made that journey.

Expect The Butterfly Diaries, Volume 2 soon.

*Bach, R. (1977). *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*. Dell Publishing Co., Inc., USA.

THE BUTTERFLY DIARIES
TE PŪREREHUA RĀTAKA



**“There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells
you it is going to be a butterfly.”**

~Richard Buckminster Fuller

BREATHE AND BREATHE AND BREATHE

A SHORT STORY BY PHOEBE WRIGHT

Based on the true story of Brad (name changed for privacy reasons).

The white tablecloths that were pristine at the start of the reception are now happily messy with empty glasses, wilted rose petals, sauce spots and the odd wine stain. The candles on the tables burn low and most of the guests have stopped dancing to lounge, sip and nibble contentedly around the marquee. Brad is sitting and nursing an apple juice, had enough beer for the night. He's happy with just a little buzz. He's had a bit of a dance with the old school friends and got plenty of exercise swinging the younger cousins around. Can't help thinking a smoke would be nice now, but he dismisses the thought.

Brad's twin sister flops down next to him, sweeping the silky lengths of her white dress underneath her. She lets her head drop onto his shoulder with a sigh. He can smell hairspray, perfume, and a sweet whiff of wine.

'Perfect day, Ros.' Brad watches his new brother-in-law farewelling guests with hugs and a big grin. Brad trusts the man. Ros will have a good life over on the coast, and Brad thinks he can expect some pretty fine looking nieces and nephews, sooner or later.

'Brad?'

'Yeah?' He picks some confetti out of her hair. Its perfect, coiled arrangement is now fraying from the long day and the dancing.

'I'm really glad you're here.' Brad's hand freezes, hovering above his twin's head. He hasn't thought all day about the fact that he so nearly wasn't here. All that darkness seems so long ago, irrelevant now, and yet it nearly stole him from his sister's wedding day, from seeing her in a white dress making promises to a good man. It nearly stole from him all the warm faces, jokes and dancing in this marquee, which he will remember and smile at for years to come. Brad brings his hand down onto Ros's hair and leaves it there. It's a firm presence, warm and alive.

'I'm not going anywhere, Ros.'

Brad rides back into town from the vineyard estate with some friends who chatter about the day and look at photos on their digital cameras. He is quiet,

looking out at the narrow headlight beams cutting into the night, and at his own faint reflection in the dark window. He closes his eyes, feels the thrum of the car through his feet and is lost in remembering.

He remembers party pills stashed in pockets, the taste of bourbon heavy on his tongue. Endless streetlight, endless short skirts and empties, the flicker in someone's eyes as they judge you. Then the mornings after, crawling through his old flat avoiding thinking about the black spots in the night before, getting texts 'i know wat u did last nite fucker' and worse. Brad falls back onto his unmade bed, pushes his face into stained sheets and throws his phone across the room.

Jeering voices all the way back from school echo in his mind, echo because it's empty, haha. The wallet in his pocket digs at his thigh. He takes it out. No cash, card'll be running low after last night. Actually, he seems to remember getting declined at a bar, swearing about it, someone laughing at him. He pulls out a photo of his family. Token gesture. His mum gave him a mini copy of the family snap from last Christmas. He pretty much never looks at it. He can see he's the odd one out, no question. Ros is laughing. He thinks *she got the looks*.

She texts him every couple of days now, some cheery bit of news, how are you Brad? Id love to catch up, whenever you can. Just let me know, k? Faking it, Brad thinks. He looks shifty in the photo. Forced smile. That bit of extra weight from the drinking and crap food shows up. The others are probably smiling so much to try gloss it over – *see, we're still a happy family despite this loser in our midst* – or maybe they're just laughing at him. Brad feels the tears start, a hot tickle around the eyes. His phone goes off again, over there on the floor. He can't get up and check it. His hand shakes as it gropes under the bed for his hip flask, or maybe that half bottle of cheap wine that was kicking around. A couple of drinks and maybe he'll get back to sleep and escape the world a few more hours. A couple of drinks and a cigarette and maybe the voices will be quiet. He swigs from the flask, can't remember why it's so light. He feels the burn, the warmth he needs.

A voice whispers *there are people who want you dead*. The chill of it claws in through his ribs and freezes him inside. His lungs are turned to ice mid-breath and he can't breathe or they will surely shatter. *I must be such a bad person. There are people who want me dead. I deserve this*. He can't even cry anymore. He screws up his face and heaves, some animal instinct trying to suck in air against his will. He thinks about texting Ros but he can't. He thinks about texting Liam, who will at least get him high. But his phone is simply too far away. His fist scrunches the photo

of his family. *They don't care. How could they care about you?* He takes another swig, unscrunches the photo, thinks how much better it would look without him in it. *Do the world a favour, Brad.*

Brad tried to 'do the world a favour' several times. He remembers a montage of hospital corridors, deep nausea and a pain in his head. He remembers a blur of pep talks from people who didn't understand at all.

Frustrated by his unresponsiveness, one went as far as saying 'you know, there's better ways to get attention'. Brad rolled over in the hospital bed and faced the wall. There seemed no point in explaining that he had not done it for attention but the opposite. He wanted no one to have to look at him ever again.

The day after the wedding, Brad is back at work, tired from the late night. He keeps his positive self-talk up in his head, aware that being tired makes him vulnerable to the old darkness. He focuses on working hard, loves making the numbers dance, happy in the knowledge that he is a small but effective part of a helpful whole. At the coffee machine, Brad chats with his workmate Dave. They might have a few hits of tennis on the weekend. Dave's got a toddler and a new baby, always looks a bit tired these days but happy and full of fresh family life. He pins his kid's scribblings over his desk next to the photo of his missus. Dave's always smiling despite the bags under his eyes.

Brad takes a walk on his lunch break, heads through the busy streets toward a little park, stopping to pick up some bread and salad. Healthy eating and exercise – he's learned to treat himself well, and every little gesture counts.

Suddenly he realizes that the skinny guy with the too-cool swagger coming toward him is Liam. His old mate, his old enemy, his old dealer. Same old suit jacket, same old eyes that see right through all your pretences of being ok. He's with some girl Brad vaguely remembers being slapped by on a morning after, with the taste of booze and the spin-out of a passing high. *I know what you did last night, fucker.*

Brad's suddenly out of breath but manages to say, 'Hey, Liam'.

Liam's eyes flick lazily over Brad's clean work clothes. 'Well look at you', he says. The girl laughs, and they are gone.

Back at his desk, the words echo and multiply in Brad's brain. *Well, look at you!*

Trying to convince the world you're worth something. Trying to convince yourself. They all see right through you. Tell me you don't still lie awake at night – tell me it's easy to get up in the morning. You're scraping by, mate – it won't last. The darkness settles in the corner of his vision, narrowing it further and further. There are people who want you dead. Do the world a favour, Brad.

Eyes closed, Brad remembers Ros's words, and the words of that counsellor she took him to. *Take a few deep breaths, deep as you can.* He does, feeling that moment of silence and fullness when his lungs can hold no more, then letting it out, becoming aware of his limbs, heavy but alive, his panicking pulse. *No need to panic, it will pass, it will pass. It is just a thought, nothing else! It only has the weight you give to it. Give it no weight, no power over you. It's just a thought and will pass. And if the thoughts come back, you can put them in their place again. Repeat as bloody necessary.*

The other voice tries again: *there are people who want you dead.* Brad takes another breath and replies to the voice in his head with his own strong voice: *Well, actually I haven't met anyone who wants me dead. It must just be you. And you're not real. I am a good, kind person.* He feels the darkness lifting. Only a little, but it's enough to get on with his day.

Dave swings by his cubicle looking stressed. 'Brad, can I ask you a favour?' Brad nearly laughs. *A favour.*

'Yeah Dave what's up?'

'Could you cover for me this afternoon? Sarah's feeling ill, and with the kids there, she won't get any rest till bed time—'

'Go home, Dave! I'll cover you – no worries.'

'Thanks, mate. I'll return the favour next week, eh?'

'Don't mention it,' says Brad.

'Well, I'll return the favour when you've got kids of your own, then. Thanks, bro. I'll see you at the courts on Saturday.' Dave grins and is gone.

Post-game on Saturday afternoon, Brad picks up the balls from the edge of the court and waves to Dave, who's off to lunch at his in-laws' place. Good game. Dave beat him, but it was close. Brad thinks about the week past, and the week ahead. Up and down, same old, but he's getting good at it. He throws a ball into the air. Its green fuzz-halo catches the sun. Brad loves the affirming thwack of a new tennis ball hitting the sweet spot. He sends it soaring; its parabola conjured by his own force, undeniable proof of his existence and energy. Thwack. *I am here and life is good.* The ball sails over to the empty half of the court, bounces and rolls. He throws another. Thwack. *I am here.*

Brad lies back on the grass by the courts, feeling the sweat drying on his face. Holding his phone over his eyes, he replies to a text from Ros. She's in town tomorrow. Then Brad switches his phone off and tosses it aside. He never used to feel ok, sober and alone. But now he wants to feel the stillness. Breathe in, breathe out. CO2 for the trees. Brad laughs at being part of it all.

The sky is a great blue bowl of summer, and in its curve there is air for him to breathe and breathe and breathe. The sky takes in his laughter like a gift and his face is heavy with sun.

BRAD'S RECOVERY TIPS



Remember suicidal thoughts are thoughts we do not have to act on: Brad learned to see suicidal thoughts as warnings it is time to do something enjoyable or take a break instead of signs that he needs to take his life. Brad has learned that suicidal thoughts and distressing voices pass if he keeps breathing and responds to them with self-care instead of self-harm. Brad explains, *“Your thoughts are not you; you alone are in charge of your actions.”*

Talk about it with someone: Whether it is a therapist, a friend, a doctor, a family member or a teacher, someone else or all of the above, talk with someone about how you feel. If they don't react the way you need them to, talk to someone else. Keep talking until you find the people you need and make it through. Talking to supportive people really does help and they are out there to be found.

Learn to enjoy life again by starting small: For Brad, a big part of recovery was learning to enjoy life again. Brad started by doing small things each day to treat himself well. This involved doing more of the things he liked and enjoyed as well as reframing unwanted life experiences, mistakes or regrets as learning tools, and being kind to himself. Doing things we enjoy helps us reconnect with a life we feel is worth living.

Build some positive coping strategies: Brad found it useful to learn mindfulness techniques and grounding strategies to help him improve the moment and interrupt unhelpful thoughts. He also finds it helpful to connect with good friends, exercise, limit his caffeine intake and avoid resorting to cigarettes or alcohol, which is how he used to cope with stress. Brad says, *“Cigarettes and alcohol are a quick fix but make it worse in the long run.”* Getting drunk can make us impulsively act on how we feel, so it's wise to find alternatives to alcohol.

Know suicide does not make it better for anyone: It is easy to start thinking that taking our life might be better for everyone. This is a slippery slope that can trick us into acting on our thoughts, and it **is** a trick. Brad found it helped to remember suicide does not make anything better. It isn't better for us because we miss out on the bit where our life gets good, and it isn't better for those around us because they are left with complex grief to carry. Knowing someone who has taken their own life puts people at risk of suicide themselves. Only staying alive gives us the option to make things better.



“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.”

~ Maya Angelou

EMERGING FROM THE PAST, TRANSFORMED

A CREATIVE ESSAY BY RAEWYN ALEXANDER

Based on the true story of Mary (name changed for privacy reasons).

Mary was in a vicious circle, a matrix, unreal and damaging, but later on she found good relationships, reprogrammed self-talk, decisions and healed her outlook. Mary believes how we recall, think and feel all work together with our actions, and trusted people changed her life. Identity is shaped by physical, cognitive/mental, spiritual and social elements. Experiences are shaped by our ideas, and Mary's no exception, shown by her story of surviving attempted suicide.

Mary initially believed when she was a young university student that 'baggage' or her past, her whakapapa, could be left at the door of academia where she escaped into study; silent about childhood bruises, her difficult Aotearoa childhood in a loving but stressed family. When the 'bag' she carried tore and 'crap came out', Mary gradually realised she always took that 'bag' home. Taking some time to discover support assisted with changes. 'Fellow students, general staff, support staff, academics, family and friends who cared and believed that something [good] would come out of the rubbish in my bag. In the darkness of my life... it was "better to light a candle than to curse the dark".' (K'naan from The Dusty Foot Philosopher). This story unfolded through intense self-analysis of her past and present. Believing only in herself, no matter how skewed, painful or troubled the outlook, Mary started to falter. Extreme violence and abuse suffered when she was younger created dark veils of doubt and trauma. She theorised about her life. People every day construct a complex reality using our experience including sensory input, memory and self-belief. Theories help us act; for example, to cross the road, if the way is clear then proceed with care. People who decide the world's mainly enjoyable, readily choose fun time with family and friends, love exercising, eat well, and plunge gladly into challenging work which draws rewards. But if we theorise there's no escaping bad treatment, harmful associations are chosen, a cloud of difficulty appears, gloomy and dangerous.

In her childhood, laden with trauma, taking a narrow side-path until no way forward existed, isolation led to huffing petrol. When Mary felt her home-town community didn't see a future for her, lacking encouragement she wanted blankness. Health issues developed too, inevitably with leaded petrol as it was then.

A brave stand to find solace began with following a passion for study; inner-strength developed. Mary decided, "to shake...out of the lie of victimhood...." People rethink, change emotional states. For survival, just as she had realised when she hid under a bridge as a child, Mary knew she needed more than suffering endured at home. Changing, one decision at a time, can broaden experience and allow well-being to return.

This young woman later decided to attend Teachers' College in Wellington, hoped to leave her home-town behind with her troubles. Study did provide an initial escape and a new city, distractions. Some entertainment included drinking excessively however and she suffered too from the emotional labour of hiding her past, damaging beliefs obstructed health and focus.

After someone else tried to take Mary's life during holiday work at home, a shocking experience, emotional upheaval ripped her 'baggage' of trouble, things started to fall out. Violence triggered disturbing memories of past attacks or injury, health problems resulted. Mary persisted thinking that university was about the mind, with everything else hidden. A lecturer reinforced this attitude. 'I told a staff member that things weren't right and what had happened over the break. They told me clearly that what happens outside of my study was no topic for conversation. So, I kept silent.'

Various traumatic changes occurred. Mary could not read an author she'd previously loved, properly; frequent childhood flashbacks were disturbing, she gave up spiritual beliefs, felt abandoned, grew weaker and unhealthy-looking. But another student noticed Mary's state and recommended counselling.

Now she sees it is a myth that unbelievable sacrifices are vital to attain academic excellence. Ignoring family and friends, splitting oneself into an intellectual state alone was not a fine act, even if this young woman did achieve her Master's degree with distinction.

Luckily, other staff at the university were more understanding. They believed emotional and physical states could affect study, wanted to know about issues. Mary began reaching out to others and they responded to her needs. She could stay with her studies and eventually find rewards. Concentration on practical concerns, having staff and faculty who kept her focussed, assisted Mary enormously. '...learning that the escape of my childhood – hours of study – could also be harmful if it is not balanced with the other aspects of life.'



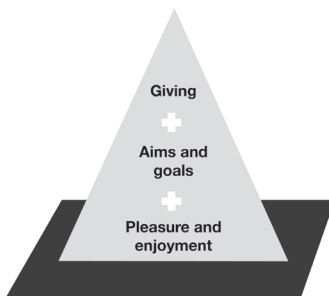
Mary eventually realised her diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD), resulting from abuse trauma, created all-consuming flashbacks and an inability to focus on well-being. Imagine the syndrome's a gas created by certain triggers; if generated and she fought against it, this created pressures and affected her. Healthiness results from keeping this 'gas' from appearing, creating instead different reactions with pleasurable activities and positive behaviour, then if adverse 'gas' does appear making sure any release minimises harm, so there is no attempt at suicide. Factors to avoid or reduce included over-work and the resulting insomnia, exposure to child abuse and bad weather (much time was spent in rain as a child). Mary also learnt to identify causes of trouble, stepping away from disturbing aspects. Time was spent then in different activities, promoting healthfulness.

Mary looked at herself, then worked towards well-being; sunlight and exercise, focus on a vocation rather than climbing a career ladder, (keeping shorter work hours) spending time on spiritual matters in a reframed Christian faith, and having friends who built her up, usually not socialising evenings which could bring about sleeplessness. Religion may provide company, awareness of spirituality, 'otherness' apart from the human ego alone, (while other people who are not religious may take up such practises as meditation, martial arts, yoga, and creative therapies), resulting in deep inner balance, a sense of identity

and of deeper relational purpose as described by the philosopher Levinas.

A new daily routine took Mary off the treacherous, despair-dominated road, towards more healthy living. Distress did sometimes nevertheless occur. When people died in a public tragedy, then a family member died who Mary cared for deeply, she also had to work with research mentioning child abuse. No matter how much change is managed with assistance from trusted family, friends, psychologists and other professionals, everyday life inevitably puts on the pressure, troubles affects us. We may struggle in this adverse atmosphere to stay with the best choices.

Mary is a highly qualified, successful person, others and herself found it hard to believe she couldn't cope. Nevertheless, people with any skills and talents may suffer depression, inability to focus or other ill effects after upset or disaster. She had to, '...dig into the physical, mental, spiritual and social routines I had established to keep a general balance.' Accepting offered support, even if she didn't think friends could help, meant trusted people allowed, 'head-space if I needed it.'



The pyramid of happiness is a model showing the *most* of what we need at the wide base, lots of tactile, visual, aural and physical pleasures are indicated there. These include the closeness of conversation, hugging, seeing people we love, sharing healthy food and outings, and recognising in the touch of another we're not alone. Human beings need to see, smell, taste, hear and feel things which are pleasurable, we require a great deal of those for happiness, first of all. These lead to hope and relating well with others.

In 2010 when her whole workplace was disbanded, redundancy was another blow.

Mary's strategy to accept assistance while not knowing other issues would arise later, helped with recovery and maintaining equilibrium. She finished her studies then, '...the opportunity to work with young people... [also] writing youth development resources ... I have been grateful for [and] grasping the opportunities to tell my story.' Sharing conversation, experiences and well-being with others give hope that can lift us, raising consciousness leaves the narrow

way of despair behind, helps access fulfilling ways forward and into that 'five senses', primary layer of the happiness pyramid. "I also love [to] laugh with my husband and have fun." Mary understands she met her partner while believing in her brokenness and married him. Once, she hated herself but, because she stayed and changed, this woman has let her man know how enjoyable his company can be, a far happier and more fulfilling place in which to base their relationship.

The pyramid of happiness middle layer shows aims and goals, needed second-most and in lesser amounts than sensual pleasures to challenge us and produce some satisfaction. Mary realised an aim, showed her loving husband how she truly feels for a happier marriage together, a worthwhile goal achieved. He'd married her hoping she'd recover and live a more satisfying life, she realised she needed to share his hope and created a stronger bond. "In ... brokenness we often can't see the despair of those who love us. It is ... a despair of ... hope..." Mary risked believing she didn't know everything. Mary stood on the stage of life, refused the victim role and believed in better choices.

She also realised the pinnacle of happiness, giving to others, presenting this man with a view of himself he'd otherwise perhaps never have known. "Happiness is a positive emotion...a good motivator and internal reinforcer of behaviour ... achieving long-range goals ... important [for survival]," states Dr. Silvia Helena Cardoso. We may, when happy choose actions usually good for us, growing motivated to behave in such ways again. By reaching out to her husband, Mary dared try something new, no longer a depressed victim and now sharing his hope for her with good results.

"The absolute falsehood inflicted on people who feel broken is that they can never recover. However we certainly can and do..."

Many suicidal people believe what they're told by bullies at the worst times, then believe they have to stay broken, (which may become intolerable) this is a lie. The absolute falsehood inflicted on people who feel broken is that they can never recover. However we certainly can and do mend, especially with assistance. A bully tries to isolate a victim, we may also bully ourselves. The moment anyone steps out of isolation, reaches to someone trusted and supportive for help, we rewrite our part, throw off the

dark veils of the negative persona who tries to trick us we are nobody.

Instead we step into the light, where we're clearly somebody, change for the better.

Due to earlier trainee teacher learning, about Mason Durie's Whare Tapa Wha (House of Four Walls) she now looked at every angle of life to find release from trauma and feeling suicidal. First, physically she'd atrophied on the couch, unmotivated, gym time forgotten. Then with family, she'd lost touch. Her husband felt unwell due to their issues, too. Thirdly, with spirituality Mary saw herself as, 'hyper-critical. I couldn't meditate ... [or] connect to myself spiritually.' Cognitive and mental well-being was considered, 'my PhD ... had got to a point that I would not finish it, (...dealing with 1000s of trains of thought so I had lost control over my thinking patterns)....' Flashbacks occurred continuously.

Medication also seemed to disturb her thoughts. After measuring her past self against more recent behaviour, other patterns emerged. Self-analysis gave a fuller understanding. '...highest risk/need was at night-time when flashbacks would start....' She used prescribed medication and alcohol to sleep. Self-assessment gave empowerment, she took responsibility for her own health and relationships. Beyond analysis, Mary's second step involved refusing to allow suicidal thoughts and depressive behaviour to define her.

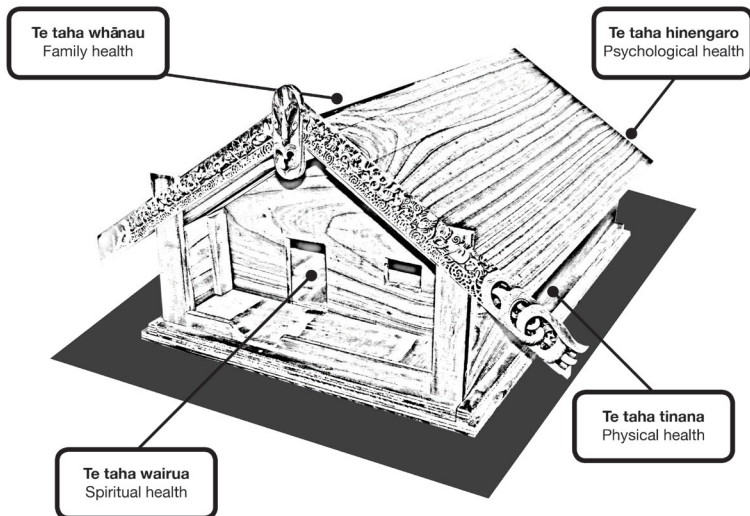
Armed with self-assessment, Mary met with people who could assist with physical, family, spiritual and cognitive/mental well-being. A personal trainer friend offered free services until she recovered. To preserve privacy Mary did the Weightwatchers' program online. She suggested her husband could share issues with people he trusted, for his support. Until recently, Mary didn't want wide knowledge of her distress, fearing stigmatisation. She returned to spiritual support and found her faith welcoming. In order to work more effectively, supervisors assisted with focus.

Mary only studied during the day, reducing workload. 'Along with University health services I also...connected with the Hutt Valley Community Mental Health service ... with a nurse and psychiatrist.' After many meetings her needs were met more effectively. 'The psychiatrist referred to a regional high-needs service for assessment, able to do an extensive risk management plan and find the right medication....' Throughout real, various dialogue Mary created a new rapport and more effective plans.

Although some weren't initially helpful, those folk who did work with Mary closely never let her down. In distress, she found others to cope for her. When

she hurt herself or abused alcohol, Te Whare Tapa Wha support stayed close, guiding and encouraging in better directions. For Mary, tapping into spiritual recovery made everything else easier. Supportive people sought to find something rational amongst the chaos.

Mental-health problems affect a whole life, pushing others away is a part of that, but with hindsight, Mary realised seeking assistance earlier would've made change easier. Allowing her husband to attend psychiatrist appointments could've created better decisions too. He'd seen the adverse medication effects.



'I had two years before the event to take control but waited until the last minute...'

Frightened that her academic future was threatened, worried her family could disown her; support people needed to understand how scary mental health problems feel. Privacy is also important. Disorders have no schedule. In lonely early hours, an anonymous, previously unknown helper on a CATT or phone line may not assist with chronic illness. A known, stable, trusted and well-informed support person could be more often available.

Mary suggests sufferers need to take control, seize the day because light brings life, we see the way clear to give to others and receive from them, enjoy the results of our heartfelt actions, 'never let darkness define your life.' Assistance from a mix of professionals, family and friends shares the load, doesn't wear out

any one group or individual. It may seem stigmatising to see a psychiatrist or psychologist, however those who Mary saw were without question extraordinarily helpful, even though she was a 'difficult patient'.

Mary believes it is important to acknowledge that we bring who we are with us, everywhere. 'I'm from a broken, but very loving, family. I'm currently a closet academic, writer, guitarist, cyclist and a youth worker and I love learning. This is my baggage ... part of my whakapapa. It is who I am.'

Those around us need to smile and accept people. 'Know us, believe in us and ask...what's going on...make sure you have that box of tissues.... Be yourself and keep your wellness complete – bring your whole self to the moment. Remember, you ignite us and drive darkness away.' Tools for healing came through relationships established by applying Whare Tapa Wha teaching, assisted with changes physically, mentally, socially and spiritually; medication wasn't the main solution for Mary but good psychologists were valuable.

A struggling start in life doesn't mean trouble has to escalate. Questioning and accepting who we are can attract assistance with our healing journey. We can choose to walk in freedom, remove the costume and scenarios of victimhood, assert control and reform to live in a more healthy way in future. The stage is our life and we own it, whatever we wish may play out there and just like in a theatre we also need supportive, informed people to help along the way. For her, 'It takes an entire university to raise an academic.'

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Happiness Pyramid theory from oral literature from a psychologist through Pro-care Auckland.

Happiness quote: <http://www.dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=5514&p=5>

All quotes from 'Mary' are from self-interview documents written by the subject of this essay.

MARY'S RECOVERY TIPS



Refuse to see ourselves solely as a victim: Mary found it helped to see herself as more than what had happened to her or the labels she had been given. Mary said she needed to shake herself out of the 'lie of victimhood' that told her she had no power, assert her control and make the choice to live. *"What I would say to others is – you do have control of your life so take it!! Don't let the matrix of thoughts drag you down – take control. Find the people you need to help you."*

Look after our whole selves every day: For Mary, recovering from being suicidal involved learning to *"live proactively rather than reactively"*. Mary found she had to create and then use physical, mental, spiritual and social routines to keep a general balance. For Mary this means getting regular sleep, balancing her work load, getting sunlight and exercise and connecting with her social supports and spirituality. Mary used Te Whare Tapa Wha to look at her whole life and plan how to fill the gaps.

Tell people what we need and ask them to help: Mary gathered a whole team of people to help with each area of her life and she was honest with them about how tough things really were. Mary did not make this journey alone. None of the people in The Butterfly Diaries made their journeys alone. Everyone needs people to stand beside them. Mary wishes she had reached out sooner; building relationships with supportive people made all the difference. Having professional support can also help our friends and family feel a bit less scared about what we are going through.

Understand where the despair of our loved ones comes from: Mary says *"In our times of brokenness we often can't see the despair of those who love us. It is not a despair of sadness but one of hope – my husband believed in who he saw me to be and it caused him distress that I denied being that person he knew I could be."* Being suicidal is really hard. Loving someone who is suicidal is really hard too – but that does not mean our loved ones are better off without us, it means just the opposite; they need us and are afraid of what will happen if we leave. We all need people we can lean on, including the people who care about us. Part of Mary's recovery journey involved allowing her loved ones to use their own supports to help them cope with the hard parts of sharing her journey.

Find our purpose in life: When we have a purpose, we can get through anything. For Mary, ultimately her recovery journey was about *"finding my purpose in life – my reasons for being here and being alive."*



“How does one become a butterfly?...You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.”

~ Trina Paulus, Hope for the Flowers

ENOUGH ANGELS

A HAIBUN BY OWEN BULLOCK

Based on the true story of Sean (name changed for privacy reasons).

I was born in 1950 in the southern part of Korea three months before the civil war broke out. I was one of seven children, the fourth, middle child. I was weak, physically, compared to others.

big brother
runs like a bull
through the dust

My mother died when I was seven, I don't know what from. I was too little to remember. My father remarried a year after my mother's death. I was not much affected by my step-mother, my siblings and I got on well with her.

My family moved to Seoul, where I had a good quality high school education and went to university to study mass communication. In my second year, my father's business broke down. He experienced a lot of nervous stress and died suddenly. The death of my father was very shocking to me. The fall of his business was sobering; my family became very poor. I volunteered for military service because I couldn't pay university fees any more. I got work translating English.

a jay
turns over a leaf
picks at something
unseen

I returned to the University, the professors were impressed by my English. I worked for the campus newspaper, and a scholarship. I grew in confidence, knowing my skills were superior to my peers. After graduation I could pass the entrance examination to any company. I chose Public Relations.

sparrows on the fifth floor
fight over a crust

I moved to another company but was again disappointed. My family began to wonder about my competence.

In 1978, I saw a notice for a construction worker to Saudi Arabia that needed to have good English, I worked there for five years. At the end of that time, I had a burden to get married, but I was worried, my age was getting on. I went home to Korea on vacation to meet a wife.

I think now that I was stupid, I married for beauty. She was happy with me because I earned good money in my job. I went away to Saudi Arabia for another year and then returned home to start a real married life. We had one daughter together.

singing in the car . . .
she points out
it's not in tune

All this time, I was a Christian in name only. I didn't have any deep depression yet, I was a little disappointed with the world.

In 1985 when my wife was pregnant with our daughter I saw the recruitment ads for the Seoul Olympic Committee. Again I passed the entrance exam and easily got a job. My life was happy until now. When I entered the organisation there were so many hierarchies and systems, so many steps, it was overwhelming. In Saudi I had worked with English people and it suited me, there was no stress and I enjoyed it. The Olympic Committee was different.

When I told my wife how I felt she was angry with me for not simply handling it. She said I should tolerate anything 'as a man' and really no-one understood me because they thought that I should be happy in that position. Korean people need to be serious in life. I used to get headaches at this time.

taekwondo –
the thought
that I will die

Five months later I couldn't take it there anymore and I quit suddenly, without consulting my wife. This was the beginning of my struggle with her.

I still thought that I could go to Saudi Arabia again. My wife was so angry she

wanted a divorce immediately, which was a surprising response because my family did not think that way, they weren't that serious. She calmed down in the end, but I could not get another job in Saudi because the construction had finished.

I decided to open a shop where people could hire typewriters (I laugh now at such old technology) and translation services, and my wife agreed to invest our money, but the business did not go well. I was naive. I had a junior who wanted to borrow money, but he ran away without paying it back. I was struggling to manage all of this on my own without telling my wife, who would be angry.

this shell
I don't own

In 1988 my wife showed me the recruitment advertisement for 'section chief' at the family planning association. I applied because my business wasn't supporting me and I got the job. But she warned me, "If you quit, we are finished."

police station
windows
are mirrors

I didn't like the Korean hierarchy system. I was middle-level management. You had to be cunning to be successful, a lot of struggling. The people around me were not genuine and always fighting. I stuck it out there for two years.

All this time my married life was not happy. I was self-consciously wishing things were different. My background did not allow divorce. I believed that I must stay married. I couldn't bear it at my job. But if I quit my wife would leave me. One day, I was quarrelling with my manager and he was insulting me. I wrote a letter of resignation but threw it away. I was about to break down so I quit and went to stay in a motel. I ran away to think. No one knew where I was.

somewhere
down this corridor
laughter

This was my most depressed time. But I wasn't suicidal. I didn't know what to do. I had nowhere to stay, so I went to my sister who lives in the middle of Korea. My wife found me there but she could not understand what I had done. She got angry.

A few days later I promised my wife I would return, but when I got home she had already prepared divorce papers. I didn't want to divorce, but I couldn't stay so I went to my sister's again.

he says
ravens
 & turns away

A few months later I returned home because an ex-colleague of mine was establishing a research centre and offered me a place. I met with my wife and told her I would work well there and calm down and so we got back together.

the food mixer whirls
 a spider makes a web
 in the sliding door

There were problems with the organisation, they couldn't pay salaries and they collapsed. I hadn't quit this time.

a hard day . . .
 the breath-taking
 sunset

I was 43, and it was harder to find a job. I could get some income as a translator through agencies with subcontracting work, but it was not enough and my wife was unhappy once more.

Buddha's birthday –
 it rains
 every hour

The pastors at my church couldn't help me with my problems. They had a religious way. I found them to be greedy. They said the same old things, "you should bear," and "you should tolerate."

My relationship with my wife got worse, soon she and my small daughter completely ignored me. When I walked into the room they did not see me. They dismissed me. It was distressing.

I went to my millionaire friend. I wanted to establish a research broadcasting

centre, and he invested some money. I was very excited, I had high-pressured thoughts, grandiose ideas, like mania. The business concept was not a reasonable one, others saw it as funny. The venture collapsed after a few months. The friend who had invested in it wanted me to work for him, he would pay me a salary and I had the title of manager, so it was not too bad. For a while, my condition was elevated, and then the depression hit. I had no desire. No appetite. I was very skinny.

My wife wanted to separate and think about things, so I was kicked out. My siblings were angry with my wife, she was acting as though a marriage was a business. No love. She thought I was idle and crazy. Now I don't blame anyone, my inward problems were the cause. I feel sorry and thankful to my family.

I couldn't insist on anything. I could not properly contribute anymore. I had no power; this was the start of my big problems.

through the mall
a man carries
a large bottle
of cooking oil

I stayed at a cheap motel. A hot summer, I could not sleep. I was annoyed at everyone. I couldn't control myself. I was weak, physically. I was hearing voices, sometimes I could not go to work. My friend was disappointed in me. I kept thinking that I better kill myself. I had no hope. No energy. The idea of going back to my wife was not good.

an old man
on the park bench
the kids pass by

I didn't meet a psychiatrist or take medication, I never went to hospital. My family didn't know what was happening to me, but they were worried and tried to send me to a mental health hospital. I refused. I struggled on by myself, drinking and smoking. People were usually mean when I told them what I felt or thought, so I stopped. I went back to my mum's house, which was a surprise to the whole family. They helped me a lot, but they still stressed me. I felt troubled by so many people and I wanted to complete suicide. I had no resting place.

My mother was praying for me and that helped a little, at least she was trying to

protect me. I was full of thoughts of ending my life but something stopped me. What was it? The idea that there was love towards me.

One day the darkest thoughts stopped. I suddenly thought, "why would I do this to myself?" Yet my problems continued.

I came to Seoul again and got work with my juniors. Then my mood swung high. When I met with friends, I wasn't at all myself. I had big eyes, I totally lost my temper and we would quarrel. I did strange things. I didn't sleep and I would go out late at night to meet friends, knock on their doors. "I will run for MP," I said. I thought I was a high ranking person, and I fought with others when they responded badly to me.

One day I was in a motel and my energy was all gone and I felt like I was going to kill myself finally. I tried to call the Korean version of '111' and they took me to hospital. I was given an injection and taken back to my family.

they babble constantly . . .
the net curtain
blown inwards

My sister said we would find a good doctor, but she and her partner tricked me into going to the mental health hospital. When they tried to admit me I took the admission form to try to stop them, but they hit the emergency button and restrained me. I didn't fight them then, I submitted.

an idea
less interesting
than the circling hawk

I stayed in hospital a couple of months. I had to pay for this and my sister put my wife's address on the invoice. My wife didn't want to pay and sent her brother to visit me. He came to check that what I had been experiencing was real to me. He explained his sister's financial difficulties. I felt more stressed and asked him not to talk about it anymore. At the end of our meeting, he wanted to donate some money for my snacks, which he did (\$100). I didn't want to receive that from him, I was simply moved by his compassion. It seemed that the purpose of the visit was to avoid paying the hospital bill by explaining their situation. From that time all the expenses were paid by my siblings. Even so, my brother-in-law is the only one to communicate with me over the phone. I am appreciative of him. And he

said he would try to give my email address to my daughter (now 27 years old) so that my daughter could contact me, if she is willing. But so far no reply.

next day
the dew drop
on the plucked rose

The medications helped. The hospital kept me restricted from the community, I was safe, contained. A doctor patrolled, asking us about ourselves. There was no therapy. But I calmed down. It was helpful, restful.

eyes closed
not having to create
that world

eyes closed
the paranoia
in here with me

My wife was worried about the way all of this would affect our daughter and the possibility that my problems were hereditary. She stopped me from seeing my daughter. I still have no answer from my daughter if I contact her. My wife felt so much shame.

to say
what I need, when . . .
starlings chittering

My elder sister wanted to emigrate to New Zealand and encouraged me to come with her. My qualifications would get me in. After I was discharged, I prepared for the move to Auckland.

colour
recedes from the island
night comes on

First I got a legal divorce so that I could be free. This was seen as the natural thing for us to do now. We divorced without paying each other anything. (Ten years later, I learned that my ex-wife donated some expenses for my coming to New Zealand on the day when we appeared at the Divorce court. The money

from my ex-wife was received by my elder brother, as he strongly requested her to share some expenses for me as a token of humanity and final affection).

a sparrow
 hovers over grass seeds
 like a humming bird

This was real freedom to me. The religious concept of not divorcing had been stressing me so much and not having to worry about that any more was a huge relief. Before, it was like being under a rock. And then the rock was lifted.

I passed the immigration English test and in January 1997 came to New Zealand. My brothers had collected the money to get me here. As I landed in Auckland, I thought, "I have hope, I have a turning point." But I was wandering. I had lost direction in this stage of my life.

To help fulfil immigration criteria, I went to work for the Korean Community Newspaper and got permanent residency. I attended a Korean Denominational Church, a common one in Korea. I was again disappointed. They did not talk about Christ but always about life, such as business or sports, which made me feel empty, not full of joy. I did not think they were genuine about religion itself.

In September, just after I got residency, some students from a New Zealand training centre doing biblical studies door-knocked in my area. It seemed to me that they were genuine Christians. Meeting them and reading their booklet, 'The Mystery of Human Life' changed everything:

As bottles are made to contain water, we are made to contain God.

It is no wonder that knowledge, wealth, pleasure and accomplishment can never satisfy you, for you were created to contain God.

travellers
 leave seaweed soup
 ways of seeing

It gave me a goal. I stopped looking outside for god or goodness. I looked at myself. The next year I joined the training centre and stayed at the dormitory. Two years there recovered my body, soul and spirit altogether. I could overcome. I had the training and the ideas, I could keep going. I was 43 kg when I went into hospital. Now I was eating properly again.

I read a book that gave me a good way to think about suicide – and a message about how to live in a way I could understand, that god really wants to make healthy, well-balanced people, who are not too spiritual and not too material. One of the pieces of writing said, “God has enough angels” – I did not need to be perfect. I did not need to ‘bear up’. A man’s life is important to god. I am the meaning of the universe and I need to be here. It is important to be here. I could be who I am, and it is not so bad to be ‘just a man.’

a water drop stretches

The new and different thought is that I don’t need super powers like an angel. It is natural that I come across difficulties or hardship which I don’t like or have never expected. Unlike an angel, I am limited, for my protection and growth in life.

After graduation from Bible training college, I thought I should meet a woman and marry. So I went to Korea and I was match-made again with a genuine Christian lady. She had had a divorce before, like me. We had the same perspectives and the same faith. So we married there. By then I was 50 years old. My brothers and my friends were happy to see me again at the ceremony, recovered and happily married.

the door
closed quietly –
did I do anything?

We came back to New Zealand and moved to Rotorua, where we lived for eight years. I say that we ‘increased’ each other. There was no stress. I helped people in Rotorua by working as a translator and doing religious ministering. My relationships were positive. I was doing things I like.

For two years, my wife and I visited Korea to help young people at the campus university church, counselling and teaching. We returned to Auckland in August, 2010. The demand for translation work decreased so I quit interpreting. I chose to be a mental health worker and am studying to be a support worker at present.

work desk
she places more daffodils
in the bowl

I have a goal: I want to help others who are having problems living. I never think about my own experience of feeling suicidal anymore. I am still with my wife. We are not rich, but we are happy. I don't have to worry about riches anymore.

an ordinary Monday
 a rainbow going
 the other way

One of the reasons we become depressed is that we go into introspection, asking 'why do I?' But this question doesn't help us to move towards the future. There is another chance. There is hope.

Sometimes we may be falling into a 'valley of death' feeling which seems to be impossible to get out of. But we can be resurrected from the dark situation and live an invigorating life, like a soaring eagle – I am the meaning of the Universe. How precious my life is!

he turns off the light
 turns it on again
 happy to be human

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SEAN'S RECOVERY TIPS



Let go of trying to be perfect: There were times in Sean's life when others treated his failures, mistakes, distress and difficulties like they were signs he was not good enough. Sean got the sense he had to be perfect to be acceptable to others. For Sean it was also important that he was acceptable (and perfect) to God. Trying to be perfect makes everything we do seem like it is not good enough. Sean says he needed to learn to accept and celebrate being a person who makes mistakes.

Create a positive relationship with our spirituality: Sean is a spiritual man who had a religious upbringing. It was important to him to live his life in accordance with his spiritual values. Part of his journey involved finding a way of understanding his spirituality that allowed him to be a human being without feeling like he was going against his spiritual beliefs and values.

Connect with people who share our interests and values: Sean was suicidal at a time when the people around him had very different views and values from him. This leaves us with a sense of isolation even if there are people everywhere. Part of Sean's recovery journey was about building positive relationships with people who shared his interests and values.

Connect with the things we value: When Sean was suicidal, life was a lot about doing the things that other people valued, the way he thought they expected him to do them. Part of his recovery journey has been about doing activities that allowed him to connect with the things **he** valued and found meaningful, enjoyable, interesting and important. This meant learning to celebrate and appreciate the small things as he slowly started doing more of the things that would make his life feel valuable to him again.

Eat well: Things got really bad for Sean when he lost his appetite and stopped eating. When we stop eating properly we rob our bodies of the strength it needs to cope well with stress and distress. When we have a lot of stress and distress, we need to nourish our bodies even more than usual, because all that stress uses up so much more energy than being relaxed does. We also need to drink lots of water to help our bodies wash out all the stress hormones (like cortisol) that are building up in our systems and making it hard to think.



“We must remain as close to the flowers, the grass, and the butterflies as the child is who is not yet so much taller than they are. We adults, on the other hand, have outgrown them and have to lower ourselves to stoop down to them...Whoever would partake of all good things must understand how to be small at times.”

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

WELCOME TO TODAY

A SHORT STORY BY HENRIETTA BOLLINGER

Based on the true story of Alice (name changed for privacy reasons).

This story; there are parts of it I don't like to remember. When I remember them, my day stumbles, stutters and has to be picked up again. There are parts I can't remember, whole days I only managed to get through by skimming across the top of them, for these I've had to depend on others who have recollected for me.

This is my story.

I was chronically suicidal from age eighteen to twenty-two. I had considered suicide on and off during my earlier teens too. But this story doesn't begin with a struggling teen feeling like she's run out of options. It doesn't begin with a young woman who, at twenty-one, thanked her psychologist sincerely but was sorry to say she was done with life – it was just too hard.

It begins with a little girl.

Smiles and frowns.

There are so many smiles, so many shining smiles... so—

"Alice?"

"Yeah, Mum?"

Across the table, Alice's mum is frowning. She stands out against this background of grins: smiling waiters, serving smiling families, filling their smiling faces. There are so many smiles. Her daughter looks away to study her almost-empty plate and scrape at the remnants of dinner distractedly.

Mum is still frowning. "You okay, love?"

Alice is quick to adopt the uniform face: mouth corners-up. She's smart, the youngest in her class but a quick learner. She knows how to follow the norm, smiles when she should. It keeps the big kids off her back. Sometimes. In front of Mum though, the camouflage slips away quickly.

"Feeling sick."

"Well, you ate a fair bit..."

Alice's stomach somersaults, fleeing from the idea.

"Oh. Mmhm. Mum? Can we go home?"

Definition.

She is looking at herself carefully. Her thin body, the thin lines of her. As a whole she is still Alice. Some days she still resembles that eight-year old who was clever enough to keep up with the big kids. This same cleverness pulls her though the final year of school and she can start at uni. There are parts of her though, that she has let slip away in the last few years. The party invites she stores away unopened and friends she has lost touch with since they decided she was 'too sad' and 'no fun'. Slowly, deliberately she is losing herself.

She doesn't eat much.

Her doctor has put a name to this, Emetophobia: fear of vomiting. It fits. Hand in hand – fingers clenched tight with the anorexia nervosa. But Alice doesn't know what to do with this definition. Neither do her parents. The self-harming started a few days before her eighteenth birthday. It hurts.

Freedom?

Alice doesn't have to hide it anymore. Her parents have moved to Australia now. The self-destructive behavior moves in, liberated. The meticulous thoughts, they take up the bed. Huge, like the space between spread fingers, like air.

Options.

Lately, there have been more. Incidents. That's what you'd call them. It feels like a clean and unthreatening word to Alice. Sometimes, she knows she's in trouble. Once, she called her psychiatrist who – she found out later – would have sat with her all day to keep her safe.

Sometimes it all feels too big.

She knows just how big when her Mum flies home. Alice told her not to. That's letting one life dictate another. And that's interference. Her mother knows Alice's position on it all. But still she comes home. Appearing among the medical faces: Mum.

This time Alice is being given options. "Australia or here?" her family asks. The clinic she chooses is in Dunedin. Her mum folds her clothes gently into a suitcase. For the first night her mum stays too. For the first night she can pretend none of this is happening.

After that, it's about Alice. Alice has to take charge. Alice has to turn her stubborn thoughts around until they are facing in a direction that will send her forward, one she can live with. Gradually, with the help of staff, and the clinic community Alice moves them.

Some hard things have to happen first.

Like allowing herself to cry. Alice's first night alone she cries. At home she would guilt herself about this and self-harm would follow. Tonight she just cries. Her first step.

These are not the only tears either. There are more. Soon after moving to the clinic she hears that a friend has died. Alice had been trying to take her life the night this friend died unintentionally. The feelings that arrive are new to Alice and at first they are relentless. This doesn't last. She learns to sit with them and note what she is feeling with respect. This too, is new for her, different to the old thoughts of guilt and the punishment she inflicted to banish these feelings. Alice could choose to self-harm but she stops herself. The strong will she used to fight on the side of her destructive thoughts she turns to her own aid: I will be okay.

Though the thought doesn't instantly 'save' her, it does help. She makes herself a promise and works on it: I'll learn to be well. Right, Alice, show me how.

There are still hard days, hard nights. On a particularly rough night she is offered a challenge by one of the nurses: write down something good about yourself. When you're done, come back and show me.

Alice doesn't often allow her head the space to think about these things. But tonight she comes back to the nurse. Its midnight but she's back.

This happens each night. The first night Alice has a single hard won thought, a few nights in this becomes a list.

And some good things too.

"So how are you?!" Some days it is impossible to get her mouth around the expected response to that question: good.

Alice says it aloud. She smiles at her friend across the café table. Today she means it. The pair has spent the day catching up.

"Feels like it's been ages."

Alice would hazard a guess that it has. It has been ages since just sitting, enjoying company has been this easy. Today no anxieties leap up to grab her throat and snatch it away from the food and comfortable flow of conversation. The change feels good. Good. She wants to make sure this happens again.

Grace

"Hello? Hi, Mum?" Some moments have gravity about them. A weight that pulls you into them. For Alice this is one of those moments. Her Mum's full, excited voice leaks down the telephone.

Later, alone in her room Alice runs the words though her mind.

Her sister. A baby, a baby. Alice's niece or nephew.

And this is one of those moments.

Alice refuses to be an aunty in photographs that this little person is never to meet. The one that fills the room with drawn faces and halfway explanations and when-you're-olders. No.

A few months later Alice flies to Australia to visit her sister and meet little Gracie. A saving Grace. Gracie... she thinks, you have no idea how much...

Welcome to Today

After leaving hospital I began my teaching degree a few months later. When I initially started it, I was uncertain that I would maintain my wellness and hadn't expected I would ever finish it. Three years later I graduated and am currently teaching at an early-childhood centre. My past has given me a great deal of patience and empathy, which I utilise on a daily basis.

When I think back on my past experiences I have two main feelings. I feel a huge amount of appreciation for those who truly helped me, who understood me and what it was like to be living my life. I also have a lot of compassion for myself. Having re-read journals from that period I am struck by how much pain and distress I was in.

It took two years to assimilate to my new self. The healthy thoughts and behaviours I had learnt in hospital continued to consolidate as I began my new life. However, they felt foreign and I found I didn't connect with myself as the 'sick' person I was used to being, or the new 'healthy' person I was. It took time, patience and a lot of discussing in therapy that this was who I had always been, but that it had been hidden underneath layers. I finally feel at peace with who I am.



“If you want to fly, you have to flap your wings.”

~ Claire Williams

ALICE'S RECOVERY TIPS



The desire to live can come in unexpected forms, from unexpected places: Look for glimmers of a future you want to be part of and hold on to them. Alice says we can't change others or the past but we can change how we deal with them and set boundaries so the future can be different.

Think of recovery as an active process: Alice says, waiting for change doesn't get us anywhere. It requires a lot of hard work, talking about the things we want to talk about the least, trying things we have been holding back from, allowing ourselves to feel horrible and connecting with things that interest us or finding things that do.

Learn new coping skills: Alice had to learn a lot of basic coping skills from scratch, so she had some positive and neutral tools to use to improve the moment when she was feeling distressed, instead of self-harm or substance abuse. Alice had help from a therapist, but it took more than five therapists to find the one that clicked.

Find a safe place when it is hard to resist acting on urges: Sometimes, even if we don't feel like being around anyone, the safest place to be is where family or friends are around and we aren't alone. Alice, like many people, acted on her urges when she was alone. Being around other people can keep us safe. Sometimes that safe place is in hospital or respite.

Reach out to the people who can help: Other people might be in a position to offer a more accurate or useful view of things when we are in a negative space. To reach out we need to trust others to help. Alice found a therapist, hospital staff and family helped her. Reaching out for training opportunities helped her develop skills, find a sense of purpose and change the shape of her daily life. Reaching out for information helped her understand what she was going through.

Allow your recovery to take time: It took Alice two years of experimenting for her new ideas and ways of coping to start to feel like they were really hers. Alice says being suicidal was about trying to lose herself. Recovery was about discovering herself in a new light. She says she needed to be stubborn about proving to herself that she could live well.



“I live on Earth at present, and I don’t know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing—a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process—an integral function of the universe.”

~ Richard Buckminster Fuller

STORYTELLER TIPS FOR SUPPORTERS



The people who shared their stories in *The Butterfly Diaries* were all asked ‘What would have helped make your journey easier?’ and ‘What do supporters need to understand?’ There were a range of different answers to these questions, which are summed up by the points below.

1. **Name your concern and ask about suicide directly:**

It’s hard to find the right moment to mention feeling suicidal, it’s always going to bring the party down. Asking us about it helps us around that barrier. But choose a private moment and give it a little lead in, so we can trust you are coming from a good place. It’s a hard subject to bring up when you’re in it, so being asked about it sensitively makes it that bit easier to talk about it.

2. Try not to freak out, just be there: There’s a long way between having a thought and acting on it. If we are there with you, we are safe for the moment. Breathe and be there. All you really need to do is listen with understanding and empathy. You don’t need to have any answers, just be there, listen and let us know you can relate to what we are going through.

3. Name your desire to help keep us alive: It can really help to hear someone say “I want to make sure you stay alive and make it through this.” If we have started getting our method ready, talk to us about getting rid of anything that might make it easy for us to act on our feelings by giving stored items to you, throwing them away or limiting our contact with risky situations.

4. Let us know you would be affected if we took our own life: Don’t give us a guilt trip, but don’t let us leave thinking it doesn’t matter to you whether we are around or not either. This is a mind-trick our suicidal urges are already playing on us, so you might need to be quite direct to get your message across. Make it harder for us to believe the world would be better off without us in it.

5. Recognise we are responding to something: When we are in a lot of pain it can be really hard to hear people saying ‘stick with it’ and ‘you’ll get through this’, because once we are suicidal we are already sick of ‘sticking with it’ and ‘just getting through’; we don’t want to get through if it is going to mean more of the same. We are suicidal for a reason; you can help by recognising some of those reasons and helping us see that things will change.

6. Ask us what we need: If you don't understand how we could be feeling and thinking this way, ask us what we need or want to be different. If we don't know, maybe what we need is some help to work that out.

7. Help us solve problems, find information, do fun stuff and access support: There are so many support services, therapies and resources out there to help us solve problems, change our experiences and connect with a life we feel is worth living. Sometimes we need a friend or family member to link us in with the help we need and support us through our first visits. Above all we need your help to maintain our connections. Connection is one of the main things that gets people through.

8. Let us know you are available to talk: Remember that suicidal urges don't follow a neat 9-to-5 schedule and support might be needed at inconvenient times. Let us know if you are willing to be one of the people we can call at two in the morning if we really need it. Let us know if there are times you aren't available too, we don't want to overload you. Not wanting to overload people can stop us from asking for help sometimes.

9. Get support for yourself but respect our privacy too: It can be draining to support someone through such a dark time. You need support too, but be careful who you talk to about what someone else has shared. Suicidal feelings are a private matter between close friends, family and trusted professionals. If you aren't sure whether it is okay to talk to a certain person about your support experience or not, ask first or leave out all the information that could identify us. Keep in mind no one wants to hear people talking about their experiences in an off-hand way. Most towns in New Zealand have a Supporting Families in Mental Illness service where you might find some good support. Check them out at www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz.

10. Get help on our behalf if you are really worried: If things are really severe, we might not be willing to listen to good advice from people who care about us nor take action to keep ourselves safe. If it comes down to a choice between respecting someone's privacy and keeping them alive, always choose life. This is hard because you might need to go against our wishes to get us safe by calling a family member, the Crisis Team or an Ambulance on our behalf or coming around to visit even though we have said we want to be alone. We might be angry with you for a while, but one day we will be truly grateful that you stepped in when you did. If you think we may be about to act on suicidal urges, call the Crisis Team. If you suspect we are underway with an attempt, call an Ambulance or the Police, if weapons are involved. If you can, try to stay with

us until the Crisis Team or ambulance arrives and stay with us when they do. This is a scary time and it helps to have support. The Crisis Team will only come if you tell them enough information to let them know there is a serious risk. They are busy and under-staffed, so they have to prioritise people according to their level of risk. You can help them understand the true level of risk. Let them know if their suggestions are not realistic for your situation or are outside of your capacity to manage. Resist the urge to downplay or dismiss your concerns.



SOME THINGS AREN'T SO HELPFUL

Storytellers shared a range of comments that spoke to some things that were better avoided. These are summed up by the points below. Storytellers all recognised it was hard to be close to someone who was feeling suicidal or making suicide attempts and very easy for supporters to

fall into doing things that weren't so helpful. We all affect each other in unknown ways and we all make mistakes in our relationships without knowing what the consequences might be. So there is no need for self-blame when a mistake is made, even though we may deeply regret it. Supporters need compassion and kindness to cope too, from themselves as well as from others. If you are supporting someone who is suicidal or have lost someone to suicide and are struggling in the aftermath, you might find therapy a helpful way of processing what has happened and supporting yourself through.

1. **Don't dismiss us or delay linking us in with help:** If we say we feel suicidal and we need help, please take us seriously, even if we look like we have everything together and wouldn't possibly act on our thoughts. It is likely we will be putting on the bravest face we can muster so we don't freak you out when we talk about it. Try not to take our brave face as a sign that we don't mean what we are saying. Even if we have no plans to act on these thoughts and urges they are still deeply distressing experiences that warrant a bit of extra support.
2. **Don't respond with anger:** We are so stuck it is hard to think of anything but the bad stuff. We don't mean to make it hard for you or hurt you; we might think you are better off without us. Responding to us with anger feeds that idea.
3. **Don't tell us we are being selfish or weak:** This is likely to be just what we are already telling ourselves. These kinds of thoughts are probably part of why we feel the way we do. It is distressing to hear people say exactly what we fear to be true. Instead, remind us of our strengths, connections and resources.

4. Don't call us 'attention seekers' for talking about it: Seeking attention so we can get help and support is exactly what we need to do. It takes courage, trust and vulnerability to say we are feeling suicidal. If we can't say it, we might act out how we feel instead. This is hard for those around us, but being labelled doesn't make it easier to find the words we need either. We need to be taken seriously and encouraged to talk about it as often as we need to. If we are able to talk about it without being labelled, you will be able to help us. If we aren't able to talk about it without being labelled, we won't talk and you won't be able to help.

5. Don't shame us if we survive an attempt: It does not help when people use our survival as an indicator of our distress or our need for support. If there is part of us that is still not 100% committed to taking our lives, that part of us deserves to be congratulated and strengthened, not humiliated and belittled. If we didn't think the attempt through logically and tried something unlikely to work, we don't need any encouragement to ramp up our efforts next time. An uncompleted attempt in no way negates the pain that led to the attempt in the first place. That pain is still very real and needs to be addressed. A previous suicide attempt places us at increased risk of making a completed suicide attempt in the future. If someone makes a suicide attempt, they need some kind of treatment. Focus your energy on making sure we get it.

6. Don't be cruel to be kind: If we are suicidal, we aren't thinking straight so being cruel to be kind is likely to backfire horribly, not snap us out of it. We have likely stopped being able to talk ourselves out of negative thoughts and your comments may be taken at face value. Distancing yourself from us or cutting yourself out of our lives doesn't teach us anything helpful or give us anything we can use to pull ourselves through. It is useful to set boundaries around what you are willing to put up with or name how hard you are finding it to support us. But make sure your overall message is one of compassion and kindness.

7. Don't think it's going to be simple: Suicidal urges are caused by a combination of thoughts, beliefs, emotions, physical responses, behaviours and situations. No one single factor or incident can really be held entirely accountable on its own. This means recovering from the experience of being suicidal involves a mix of factors and different strategies that take time to be discovered and to work their combined magic. We will likely need you more than once. Please don't give up on us. We will get there if you stay walking with us.



THOSE WHO HAVE MADE IT THROUGH GIVE THANKS TO...

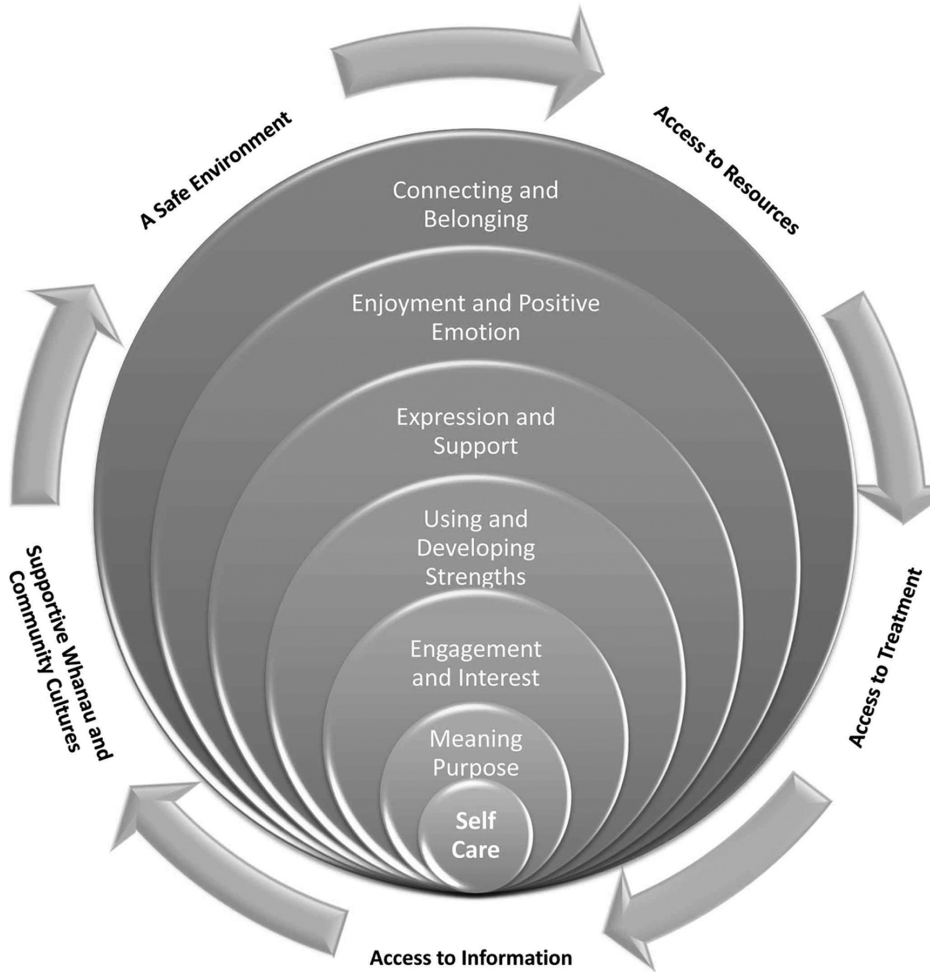
The people who found us and got us to hospital alive
 The advocate who made sure we got the treatment we needed
 The doctor who stopped and asked us how we were really doing
 The funding streams that made treatment available
 The counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists who guided us back
 The therapist who let us sit in the waiting room all day just to keep us safe
 The doctors, nurses and social workers who checked in the next day and next week
 The support workers who helped us navigate the system and stay on track
 The peer support workers who stood beside us and shared what they had learned
 The compassionate, understanding ones at work, at school, at university
 The family, who loved us, visited, called, gave us safe places and stayed involved
 The partners who stuck by us and saw the good in us when we couldn't see it
 The friends, who dropped round, came with us, texted back and kept including us
 The people who made different kinds of information available
 The strangers with like minds who welcomed us in
 The chances to connect with the things that give life meaning
 The unexpected twists of fate that gave us the inspiration we needed
 The people who continue to walk with us
 The memories we have been part of since
 The things we have been able to give
 And time.



“It is not enough merely to exist,” said the butterfly, “I need freedom, sunshine, and a little flower for a companion.”

~Hans Christian Anderson

THE ENGAGE MODEL OF MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION



When researchers explored what defines the experience of a meaningfully happy life, they found seven core symptoms of what they termed 'Flourishing'. People who were meaningfully happy still experienced stress and distress but they also experienced meaning/purpose, enjoyment, interest/engagement, a positive self-view, optimism, resilience and positive relationships. These 'symptoms' do not come from no where. We can break these experiences down into the practices that create them and the environments that support them. For example, meaning and purpose doesn't just happen, it is something we make by doing meaningful things; enjoyment comes from doing things that are enjoyable and having access to the options we need; a positive self-view comes from the act of caring for ourselves, from using our strengths and from being cared for. We all need to do certain things and connect with certain environments to experience mental wellbeing. The free resources at Engage Aotearoa are designed to help people find the support and info they need to do this.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES | HAURONGO



MEET THE WRITERS

Raewyn Alexander

Emerging From the Past Transformed

Raewyn Alexander is a novelist, poet, short story and essay writer. Her popular blog is <http://poeticjourneytoamerica.blogspot.co.nz/>. Her body of work includes 11 books – novels, (Penguin), non-fiction (David Ling), and poetry (AUP and Earl of Seacliff), also a chapbook and CD recording, (poetry to music), Family of Artists, writing in many magazines and anthologies in NZ, Australia and the USA, while Radio NZ broadcasts her stories. She is also an editor, publisher and educator. One of her essays was recently shortlisted in the top five of the prestigious Landfall Essay Competition.

Henrietta Bollinger

Welcome to Today

Henrietta Bollinger has been sending her work into the world since 2009 when she performed at The Parnell Festival of Roses and had a story published in Redraft. She was awarded the NZSA CNZ Youth Writing Mentorship in 2010 and continues to publish and perform. She has since been writing for Tearaway Magazine and keeping her creative spark alight through joining Rising Voices, a competition and series of workshops through which she met some amazing performance poets full of words and fire. Most recently Henrietta had a short play performed as part of Scratch New Writers Night; her piece was a collection of observations and ideas stemming from being a young woman with a disability.

Owen Bullock

Enough Angels

Owen Bullock is a poet, short-story writer and teacher born and bred in Cornwall who has lived in New Zealand since 1989. Bullock has won awards for his poetry and is widely published in New Zealand and overseas. He has been an editor of several magazines, including Poetry NZ, Takahe, Bravado and Kokako. He has published poetry, haiku, fiction and non-fiction.

Mike King

Foreword

Mike King has for years been known as Mike King the Kiwi entertainer and comedian but that role has changed dramatically over the last four years ever since the conception of his radio show *The Nutters Club* back in 2009. These days Mike is better known for his work as a prominent mental health educator with the work he does with *The Key to Life Charitable Trust*, which aims to reverse the population trends of depression and suicide by effecting positive social change.

Phoebe Wright

Breathe and Breathe and Breathe

Phoebe Wright grew up in Christchurch and graduated from the University of Canterbury with a Bachelor's in English and Political Science (double major). Her short stories have been published in *The Six Pack* (2006) and the *Redraft* series (2005-2010). She placed third in the 2012 NZ National Poetry Slam. She continues to write further stories and poetry, with a focus on spoken poetry and storytelling.

MEET THE EDITORS

Michelle Bolton


Co-editor

Michelle Bolton is a poet, film-maker and event organiser with a special interest in suicide prevention. She spent three years studying at the prestigious SUNY Purchase Film School in New York. Michelle is involved in a range of community poetry projects; she is one of the emcees at New Zealand's longest running open-mic event, *Poetry Live*, founder and coordinator of the New Zealand Poetry Slam and a member of *The Literatti*. Her poetry has been published in *Live Lines*, *Blackmail Press* and *Catalyst*. She completed the Bachelors in Creative Writing programme at Manukau Institute of Technology. She placed third in the 2013 *Going West Poetry Slam*.

Miriam Larsen-Barr

Editor

Miriam Larsen-Barr is a writer and mental-health activist with a background in psychology and a long history within the service-user movement in NZ and abroad. *Engage Aotearoa* is her effort to make it easier for other people to find what they need to get through. Her poems have been published in *Landfall*, *Brief*, *Takahe*, *JAAM*, *Poetry NZ*, and a number of anthologies. Her collection, *Bullet Hole Riddle*, was published in 2014.



The Butterfly Diaries shares four true stories of recovery from the experience of being suicidal as told by four creative writers.

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, 1 in 6 people have suicidal thoughts each year. The Butterfly Diaries gives voice to the stories of those who have been there and made it out alive. It is a normal human response to feel hopeless sometimes. It takes a great deal of distress tolerance, brute determination, skill development, support and understanding to survive the urge to act on those thoughts and feelings when they arise. But hardly anyone ever talks about suicidal thoughts and feelings, making it even harder for people to find out how to get through. Sean, Jane, Mary and Brad have all been suicidal, survived their own suicide attempts and found their way to a place where they are glad to be living their lives. In The Butterfly Diaries they share how they strengthened their wings and learned to fly.

“The absolute falsehood inflicted on people who feel broken is that they can never recover. However we certainly can and do...”

~ Raewyn Alexander, Emerging from the Past, Transformed: Mary's Story

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The Butterfly Diaries is an Engage Aotearoa initiative to make recovery stories easier to find.