

**Walking Without Skin  
From Fear to Forgiveness to Freedom  
A Journey of Healing**

**Free Assessment for you!  
Healing from Hurt**

**Where are you on your journey of healing from your place of hurt or loss?**

Take this free assessment to understand what is holding you back from completing your healing journey and discover ways to help you move forward to recovery.

Follow this link to take this confidential assessment:

<http://walkingwithoutskin.com/healing-quiz/>



## FOREWORD

Fly free.  
Follow me on my journey of healing.

I wrote a journal.  
A daily deliberation.  
Raw and brutal and honest.  
It echoes my every emotion, thought, and behaviour.  
It covers a period of 14 years.

Looking back now, 12 years after the last entry, I see the path of that healing journey.  
I see the patterns.  
I see the story.  
I see the lessons.

I created my model for recovery and healing (depicted graphically) to show how, after facing trauma, one moves from victim, to survivor, to thriver, and beyond that to freedom, and I have used this model to frame the structure of this book – part memoir, part self-help guide. I have taken extracts from the journal to fit into each step of the healing process in my model.

As a result, there are time jumps. There is not always a chronological order, and each chapter can almost be read on its own as each one depicts one aspect of the journey.

A reflection encompassing the learning from that experience follows each chapter.

My story can be read as a narrative without reading the reflections, which are clearly marked.

The book ends with a chapter called Final Lessons, which serves as a guide for you to follow on your own journey of healing.

### **Why Walking Without Skin**

Exposed to the world.  
Walking without protection.  
Walking with vulnerability.  
The skin holds us together and protects our delicate parts.

The first thing we see when we look in a mirror is our outer covering, our skin.  
It reflects our self-image and acceptance.

The skin is also about sensuality and sexuality. Rape and sexual violence make us feel “dirty”, unloved, unwanted, judged. This affects our sensuality.

We breathe through the skin, and after trauma it is difficult to fully breathe in life.

Walking Without Skin is my journey of vulnerability

**Cover design**

My sister Lizz painted this likeness of me many years ago.



It depicts me rising peacefully out of the chaos and turmoil of my experiences, whilst rooted strongly in reality.

This is my tribute to her as she left this world shortly after writing the Final Word for this book.

Cover design by Luthfie Aulia



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# FEAR

## Yes, It Can Happen to You

### Saturday 30 December 1995

Working late at night in my small printing business.  
Trying to make an honest living.  
Trying to get the New Year off to a flying start.  
Making button badges.  
Mindless, physical work.  
A hot evening.  
Every excuse not to be there.  
Should have spent the weekend kloofing.<sup>1</sup>  
Didn't.  
Should have gone to my dear friend Sarah's for dinner.  
Didn't.  
Should have joined Maria and her friends for dinner and drinks.  
Didn't.  
Should have gone through to Plettenberg Bay to spend New Year with Mandy and her family.  
Didn't.  
I worked.  
Second night in a row.

Last night – Friday – first day of the New Year long weekend – and I was nervous.  
Phoned Home Alarms and asked them to keep an eye out for me. They escorted me to my car at 1:30 am this morning.

I am not nervous tonight.  
Sitting in the warmth of our secure, secluded courtyard.  
Making badges.  
I don't hear him.  
The radio is on.

My first awareness of him is when he has one arm around my throat and the other holding a screwdriver to my neck.  
He is small and slight and dark.  
He has on a blue cloth cap and a blue T-shirt.  
He has a moustache.

I scream  
And scream.  
He stabs me in the cheek.  
I scream  
And scream.  
He stabs me in the neck.  
He stabs me in the neck.  
He stabs me in the neck.

---

<sup>1</sup> kloofing: scrambling or abseiling

He is small.  
I can overpower him.  
I grab the screwdriver and thrust it into his side.  
He tightens the grip around my throat.  
I feel myself blacking out.  
I fight back.

I lunge  
I plunge  
I hit  
I kick  
He stabs  
I scream  
I lunge  
I plunge  
I hit  
I kick  
He stabs  
I scream

We fall to the ground.  
He hits my head against the wall.  
I fight.  
He grabs the screwdriver.  
He stabs me in the ear.  
Blood gushes out.  
I scream.  
I can't hear the scream.

He stabs me in my throat.  
He stabs me in my mouth.  
I see a tooth fly through the air in slow motion.  
It must be mine.  
I don't feel it.

I lunge  
I plunge  
I hit  
I kick  
He stabs  
I scream

Blood gushes down my face and neck.  
A lot of it.  
He stabs me again.  
I hit him in the face with my fist.

He pushes me, head down, shouting *See what you made me do!*  
He strangles me.  
My contact lenses pop out.  
I can't see.

We face each other.  
I say – *Let's talk about it. My name is Lois.* He says his name is Richard. We shake bloody hands.  
I take the opportunity.  
He is small and I am sure I can overpower him.  
I grab his balls.  
Miss. His jeans are heavy and baggy.  
He takes the opportunity.  
He stabs me again.  
*See what you made me do!*  
I hit him in the face with my fist.  
He breaks a glass.  
He tears my T-shirt and grazes my chest.  
He pushes the glass into my stomach, cutting me.

Gushing blood.  
Flowing flood.

He tells me to undress.  
I look at him.  
I beg him.  
I plead with him.  
He lunges.  
He's going to kill me.  
I'm going to die.  
I do not want to die.  
I stop fighting.  
I undress.  
He tries to force me forward over the table.  
I beg him not to.  
I need to see him. To see what is coming.  
He grabs some packaging strap and wraps it around my neck.  
He tells me to lie on the floor.  
I beg him not to.  
I need to remain standing. To have some control.  
He pushes me into the corner...

Afterwards ...  
I'm incredibly in control.  
He wants to tie me up to a pole.  
I plead with him – I can't move; I'm too old.  
He leaves me on the bench and ties up my hands.  
I flex my arms and hands so that there is plenty of slack.  
He goes into the office.  
I throw the keys over the wall.  
He sees me.  
He hits me.  
*See what you made me do!*  
He ties my hands behind my back and to my feet.  
With cord. With my belt. With a chain. With my bikini top.  
But not before I have managed to grab a piece of the broken glass.

He tapes up my mouth with some packaging tape.  
I struggle to breathe.  
He goes back inside.  
He finds the petty cash box, brings it outside and breaks it open.  
I pretend to have passed out.  
He pulls my hair and threatens me with the broken glass.  
What is the PIN number for the Allied card?  
It is not a credit or debit card. It is for the credit card machine. There is no number. He does not believe me.  
He hits me.  
He puts on a yellow kitchen glove.  
I get really scared. What perverted plan has he in mind now?  
It's just to avoid fingerprints.  
Now?

He takes the money out of the petty cash box.  
He finds my car keys.  
He takes the radio.  
He leaves.

Totally in control, blood dripping – I hop to the phone.  
Blood oozing down my face and running down my stomach, I call the Home Alarm number and emergency 10111.  
I undo my hands.  
I put on my shorts.  
I find a company T-shirt.  
I get dressed.  
I phone friends Sarah and Maria and my house mate Tommy.  
I become hysterical.  
I collapse.  
The police and 911 Home Alarm response team arrives.  
He has been caught.  
He has crashed my car.  
My friends arrive.  
The ambulance arrives.

## Reactions, Shock and Disbelief

**Sunday 31 December 1995**

Was last night real?  
Hospitals.  
Doctors.  
Police.  
People.  
Everyone genuinely concerned.  
Sensitive. Caring. Sympathetic.  
Everyone so nice.  
Compassionate.

A hot bath.  
Red from blood.

My dearest friend Sarah spent last night in my bed to comfort and support me.

Dientjie.  
She was there right from the beginning.  
Said the right things.  
Whatever they were.  
Kind and gentle and understanding.  
Untiring.  
At my insistence, she took my statement at three in the morning.  
Sweet and innocent in a violent and horrific world.  
Dientjie.  
Sergeant Dientjie Linde.  
The first person on the scene.

The rapist was out on a suspended sentence.  
For rape.  
An ex-girlfriend.  
He had been found guilty on four housebreaking charges.  
Why was this skollie<sup>2</sup> walking the streets?  
Why was he walking my street?

New Year's Eve.  
My friends rally around.  
Partner John cuts short his holiday.  
John and friends clean up the evidence of the nightmare.  
They spend New Year's Eve making button badges.  
Mindless work.  
Misty and Richard, Jenny and Mark,  
And Jo and Maria,  
Julia and Melanie.  
Everybody.  
There.

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<sup>2</sup> skollie: Afrikaans. hoodlum or thug (informal)

For me.

Helping us start the New Year well.

Giving up their holidays and New Year celebrations.

To help me.

My hiking buddies giving up their sunset hike to help.

For hours they toiled.

For me.

And last night it was my long-time friends, Sarah and Peter and Maria and Carl and Tommy.

Holding me.

Hugging me.

All there.

For me.

I've been raped.

So what?

I've been attacked.

That was worse.

I'm in pain.

I can't swallow or turn my head.

I've been raped.

What does that mean?

I'm refusing to face it.

I say it.

I was raped.

Yes, a man raped me.

He hurt me.

He hurt my neck, my ear, my mouth, my arms, my stomach.

He stabbed me with a rusty screwdriver.

He raped me.

That didn't hurt.

There is no wound.

Doctors.

Casualty.

Specialists.

Tests.

The day is a haze.

I'm in pain.

People coming and going.

Dientjie.

Others.

I hear the celebrations.

Maria brings me a glass of champagne.

I don't touch it.

Me?

My dear friend Maria spends the night in my bed to support and comfort me.

## Reflection - A Journey of Recovery and Healing

Many years after this dreadful experience I developed a model for recovery and healing, based on various books and other sources that I referred to over time.

We all go through life functioning according to our own definition of normal. When we experience a major disruption in life, anything from losing a job, to divorce, to an accident, to rape, to the death of a loved one, we become disrupted.



It is important to note that each person experiences their own unique journey and that this experience is not linear. It is a convoluted and complex process. We can move between phases at any time, and for any reason. We can go quickly through some of the phases and we may go through some of the phases at the same time. We go up and down and backwards and forwards and even when we have achieved success, something may trigger us, and we will find ourselves falling back into an earlier phase. There are no clear boundaries between phases, and we may not even notice the subtlety of the changes.

Our progress also depends on our past experiences, our earlier life patterns, our self-perception, and our outlook on the future.

In whatever way we move through these phases, each phase builds on the experiences and learning from previous phases and each time we return to a later phase it is with more resilience and with acquired abilities.

Some of the dangers on the road to healing are that we may miss the signs. We may not recognise the emotion we are feeling: is it anger or frustration; is it a perceived threat or anxiety? And we may not accept these feelings as real or important, so we ignore them, allowing them to fester. Or we may react in a way that does not serve us, and then we do things which, rather than help us, may increase our stress levels.

Then, over and above the emotional healing, there are various patterns and behaviours

#### **Thursday 6 June 1996**

There's an 'It won't happen to me' syndrome.  
Even me – I have been raped – I still have that attitude.  
I lock and latch my front door. The latch is a new addition.  
I lock my balcony doors.  
But I don't lock my car doors while driving at night.  
And I'm not afraid to walk alone in the dark.  
It won't happen to me.  
Not in my car.  
Not in the streets.  
It only happens in locked houses and offices.  
If this is how I behave, how on earth can I expect other women to protect themselves?  
To realise that they are potential victims?  
That, yes – it can happen to you.

And the only reason I lock my balcony doors?  
Not only because Smitti (Sanette Smit<sup>3</sup>, the self-defence expert I met) tells us that these rapists can scale drainpipes and enter any building anywhere.  
But because a man climbed **my** drainpipe.  
Onto **my** balcony.  
My new (and now ex-) housemate.  
He lost his key.  
I was sleeping.  
He couldn't get in.  
He clambered onto the balcony.  
I was so frightened and angry, I made him jump down again.  
Even though he was already inside.

What does it take to learn a lesson?

#### **Sunday 27 October 1996**

##### **No – it won't happen to me!**

That should be the title of my book.  
We all go through life saying that bad things happen to other people.  
Not to ourselves.  
Even though I was raped, I still take chances.  
I don't lock my car doors.

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<sup>3</sup> Sanette Smit: See chapter: Self Defence and Beautifully Bold

I sit with my front door open.

Well, it nearly happened to me a second time.

Yesterday afternoon, while watching the rugby, I fell asleep on the couch.

It was a hot still day.

The front door was open.

The garden door was shut.

The ringing telephone woke me.

I made my way to the next room when three black youths ran out of my house.

OUT of my house!

They had calmly walked into my house while I was sleeping.

Right past me.

They probably hadn't seen me.

The phone rang.

It woke me.

It must have scared them.

Sarah's voice on the answering machine.

I don't know what would have happened if Sarah had not phoned just then.

I don't want to dwell on that eventuality.

They ran out.

I gave chase.

Screaming.

I fell down the stairs.

My wrap-around came off.

Naked in the street; my neighbours thought I had been raped.

A stranger gave chase.

I called 10111.

They were not caught.

The audacity of those guys.

Climbing over my six-foot high wall in broad daylight in full view of the overlooking houses.

Several cars were parked in the bays.

The inhabitants must have been at home.

And still these youths came on their devious mission.

Whatever that was!

## Victim

### Numbness and Anger and Depression

#### Monday 1 January 1996

Flowers.

Food parcels. Jelly and custard and yoghurt and grapes.

Things to help the sore throat.

Survival kits – champagne and brandy cake.

Doctors bags – champagne and Sustagen<sup>4</sup>  
Picnics.

I still smell him on me.  
I feel repugnance and disgust.  
Nausea wells up in my throat.  
I resist hysteria.  
The girls clean me up.  
Wash me.  
Cut my knotted hair because they can't get all the blood out.  
Tommy, my house mate, washes my blood-stained shirt.  
And sheets.

Lizz, my darling sister, arrives from out of town.  
Reflexology calms me and helps me sleep.

I remember the doctor in the casualty ward.  
I was lying with my knees bent up on the bed.  
He wanted to pat me on the knee.  
He kept putting his hand out and then stopping.  
Obviously uncomfortable.  
Afraid of my reaction?  
Hey – I was raped.  
By a stranger.  
Not by a doctor.  
Not by a friend.  
Men friends and doctors with sympathetic hands can touch me.  
It's okay.

People coming and going.  
My house like a railway station.

There have been moments of humour and laughter and pleasantries.  
Sarah looking down my throat and into my ear with an optic viewer. She really has seen me inside and out.  
The rapist should have cut me deeper in my abdomen, then I could have had a tummy tuck.  
Join the dots between all my scars.  
Joking with friends around picnics on my bed and in the bright sunny front garden.

My sister is here.  
Everything is going to be okay.

My fabulous sister Lizz spends the night in my bed to comfort and support me.

## **Tuesday 2 January 1996**

Just having my sister near helps.  
She doesn't have to be in the same room.  
She doesn't have to touch me.  
A tower of strength.

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<sup>4</sup> Sustagen: nutritional supplement

Her reflexology and wonderful manner also help.  
She repairs my hair cut.

*The Argus* ran an article: **Marked drop in violent crime over holiday period**  
... a 40-year-old businesswoman was raped and robbed of cash, jewellery and her car by a man who attacked her in her shop in Cape Town late on Saturday. After the attack at the shop, police arrested a 25-year-old Valhalla Park man and confiscated R1000 and the victim's car.

That was me.

I appeared between the stories of a 25-year old rape victim and a 20-year old gang rape victim.

Statistics!

When do we ever hear of the punishment for these crimes?

Are there any punishments meted out?

It was all so matter-of-fact – a marked drop in violent crime!!

Lizz spends the night in my bed to comfort and support me.

It was the closest I have come to in terms of reliving the ordeal.

I went to fetch my car.

There was a bullet wound in the rear bumper – there had been a shoot-out.

The front suspension was damaged.

I couldn't drive it home.

That pissed me off.

Earlier today I had a call from a relative. Someone I don't usually have much contact with.  
Sympathy and 'understanding' and having to make small talk.

I cried.

Maybe it was frustration.

Maybe embarrassment?

Maybe I feel that I am now on show and everyone is staring at me.

Maybe I don't want everyone to know.

Leave me alone.

I'm okay.

I have my sister. And Sarah. And Maria.

I don't need anyone else.

Leave me alone.

Friends visiting and calling.

Shopping and cooking.

We eat.

We drink.

They tell me I never stop talking.

And laughing.

I'm spoilt.

Some friends tell me that I should not tell so many people.

I get angry for the first time.

I'm going public.

This sort of thing must not happen again.

I should have fought harder.  
He was smaller than me.

I don't remember too much else about the evening.

Lizz spends the night in my bed to comfort and support me.

#### **Thursday 4 January 1996**

Today I got pissed off.  
Everybody means well.  
And they are right.  
Maria keeps insisting on my taking an HIV/AIDS test.  
I keep saying I'll wait for his results first. Why should I subject myself to a test and pay for it if he is clear?  
I forget about the window period – he might already have it and it doesn't yet show up and I think that we are in the clear and then I contract it later and they say that I already had it and then I can't blame him for it and he gets away with it.  
I don't care.  
I'm tired.

Lizz wants to do normal things like shopping: for food; for a T-shirt for me to replace the one destroyed in the rape; for a new Swatch Watch.  
I don't care.  
I don't want to do these things.  
I don't want these things.  
I'm tired.

Get the stitches out.  
The wounds are healing nicely.  
My jaw and mouth are still very sore.  
I still need the throat X-ray.  
I don't want it.  
I wish it would all go away.  
I don't care.  
I'm tired.

Doctors, friends, police keep advising me to go for professional counselling.  
I'm not strong enough, they say.  
Yes, I am.  
And even if I'm not –  
I don't care.  
I'm tired.

The insurance broker and assessors come around.  
Am I okay with an assessor who is a man or would I prefer a woman?  
Kind and sensitive and sympathetic.  
What compensation for me?  
Not much, by all accounts.  
Who is going to pay for all my medical expenses?

What about the pain and suffering?  
Oh God – I don't care.  
I'm so tired.  
People talking, talking all around me.  
I want to talk about it.  
I talk.  
Some people listen.  
Others don't.  
They touch on the 'subject'.  
They feel awkward.  
They don't know what to say.  
Or they say the wrong things.  
I don't care.  
I'm tired.

I switch off as people are talking.  
I'm not thinking of anything in particular.  
Not thinking at all.  
I'm tired.

I 'go out' for the first time with the girls.  
One friend's husband joins us.  
A truly pleasant evening.  
He puts an envelope in my pocket.  
To help with expenses.  
His kindness overwhelms me.  
I cry and cry and cry.

It hurts my face to sleep on my left side.  
I'm tired.

Lizz spends the night in my bed to comfort and support me.

### **Friday 5 January 1996**

I opened the office today.  
They all wanted to stop me.  
I need to take control.  
To regain my life.  
I insisted.  
It was fine.  
I'm going to be okay.

I spoke to a staff member.  
She has her own ghosts to face.  
She is young and impressionable.  
She feels guilty.  
She should have been there with me.  
Helping me make badges.  
No.

No.  
You couldn't have helped.

I realised that all my friends and relatives also need help through this ordeal.  
I hope that I can help them as they are helping me.  
I pray that I can thank them adequately.

Flowers.  
More flowers.  
Phone calls.  
More phone calls.  
Caring, caring, caring.

Throat X-ray.  
All appears normal.  
The doctor says I'm lucky.  
Lucky?  
Lucky to be attacked and raped?  
He doesn't mean that.  
It's just that I am oversensitive.

I can swallow now.  
And I don't sound like a teenage boy whose voice is breaking.  
My jaw is still sore, and I can't open my mouth too wide.

Lizz takes me shopping.  
We find my favourite butterfly T-shirt.  
The one that the person who attacked me – no, the rapist – destroyed.  
Lizz buys it for me.  
I find a bikini top like the one I had on underneath the T-shirt.  
The one he used to tie me up with.  
I buy it for myself.  
Soon things will be normal again.  
I still haven't accepted what has happened.  
Physically I'm healing.  
Stitches are out.  
I can talk almost normally.  
I can eat and swallow.  
Scabs are forming on all the stab wounds.  
My jaw still hurts.  
I battle to lie on my left side.

Emotionally,  
I was raped.  
What does that mean?  
What is it?  
The dictionary definition:  
*Rape – take by force; violate chastity of; force sexual intercourse on; carrying off by force, ravishing or violation of a woman; unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent.*  
What does it mean?  
To me?

How should I feel?

I tell people.

I tell everyone.

Am I telling too many people?

Should I have told anyone?

Bad news travels fast.

You bet it does.

Calls. Calls. More calls.

Messages.

People are talking and hearing about the rape from other people.

Are people as affronted as I am?

Some of them feel as though they were violated themselves.

There is a queue waiting to murder this rapist if he should ever get out.

Even my thirteen-year-old nephew has devised some devious methods of punishment.

The amazing thing is how many other stories emerge.

A friend, an active Christian, with his own inner battles wants to torture and murder the perpetrator.

Is this an acceptable thought for a Christian?

All his church associates seem to feel the same way.

It's incredible the anger that my friends and relatives are feeling.

They are all concocting nasty forms of revenge.

They have all threatened murder if he should ever be set free.

Friends try to tell me how they feel.

Some can't express their emotions.

They let me talk.

They listen.

They seem to understand.

My hurt.

My anger.

The men have felt this anger too.

The women have felt affronted and degraded.

As though it had happened to them.

I never thought that would occur.

That people would experience my pain so personally.

To have that level of empathy.

It's comforting in a funny sort of way.

Knowing that others feel my pain.

Not only for me.

But for them too.

One woman was raped at 16.

She didn't tell anybody.

And has carried the scars into her midlife.

She says: talk.

Another woman was repeatedly abused.

She turned to lesbianism.

She says: talk – and stick to boys.

Yet another woman was abused.

She hasn't told anybody till now.  
She says nothing.  
Another woman went to court – to try to get a rapist convicted.  
Many years ago.  
She says it was the second most terrible experience of her life.  
The court case, that is.  
She remembers it as if it happened yesterday.  
She says: talk.

It has to be stopped!

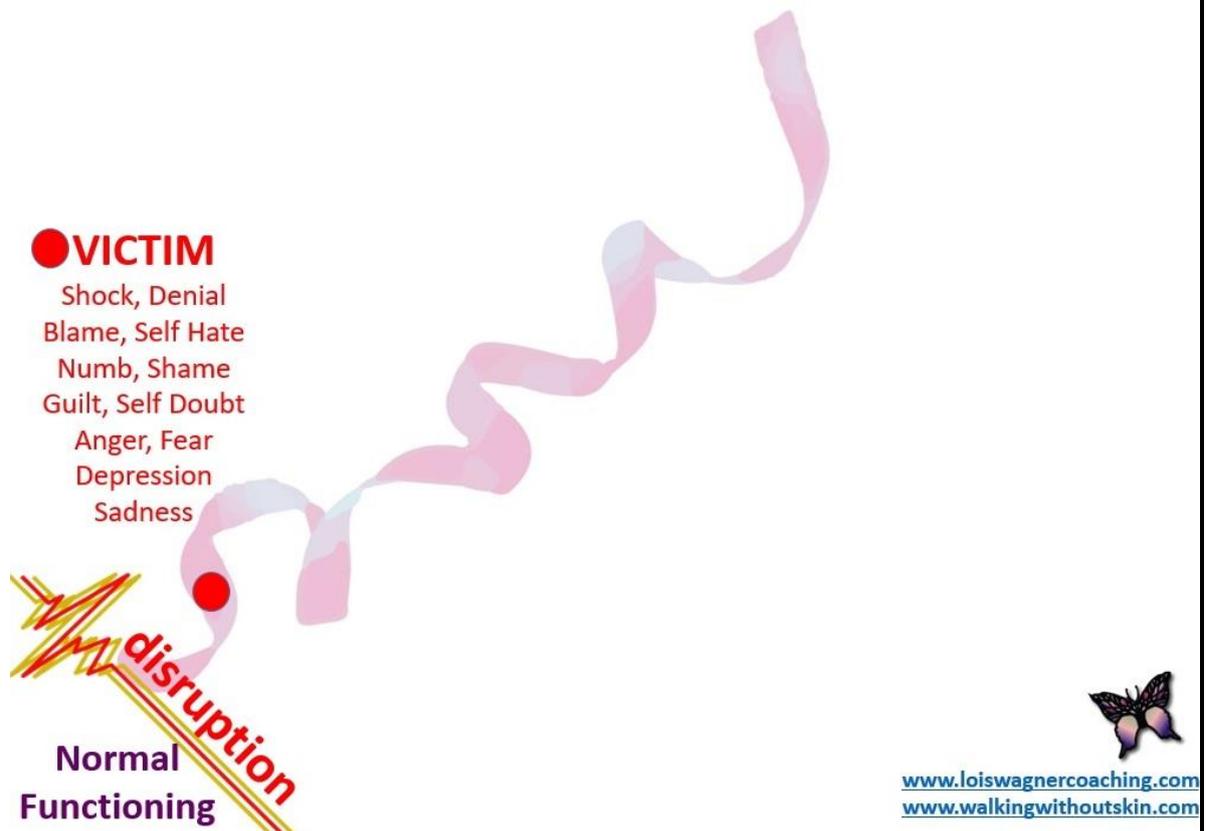
Sarah and Maria went to the rape centre clinic.  
For me.  
For themselves.  
They have been so marvellous.  
So supportive.  
So caring.  
So practical.  
Where would I have been without them?  
Holding me.  
Helping me.  
Doing things for me.  
Feeding me.  
Loving me.  
I forget that they are suffering too.  
I can't help them.

I go through the black bag in which the police returned all my belongings.  
I find his blue cap.  
I feel revulsion.  
I throw it across the room.  
I get cold shivers.  
Lizz puts the cap out of sight.

Lizz spends the night in my bed to comfort and support me.

## Reflection - Immediate Victim Impact

Our immediate reaction after facing a life or business challenge, adversity or disruption, is usually that of becoming the victim of that situation or circumstances<sup>5</sup>.



In the previous Reflection section, I alluded to the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Together, she and David Kessler developed their Five Stage of Grief model<sup>6</sup>

John M Fisher developed a personal transition curve<sup>7</sup> in which he explains the highs and lows of change. Numerous other researchers and authors also defined various stages in change, growth, and healing.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See chapter: Do I Have PTSD?

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross & David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*, 2005. <https://www.amazon.com/Grief-Grieving-Finding-Meaning-Through/dp/1476775559>

<sup>7</sup> John M. Fisher. *The Change Curve*. <http://www.changetoolkit.org/change-curve/>

<sup>8</sup> Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change: Unfreezing, Changing & Refreezing, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/lewins-3-stage-model-of-change-unfreezing-changing-refreezing.html>

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Hiatt. *The ADKAR model*, <https://www.toolshero.com/change-management/adkar-model/>

<sup>10</sup> John Kotter. *The 8-Step Process for Leading Change*. <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>

Based on these theories and on my own experiences, I have linked some elements from the first few stages of the grief or change cycles to my understanding of the term 'victim'. My definition of victim includes these reactions, emotions, and feelings:

- Shock and denial – avoidance, confusion, bewilderment, horror, fear, numbness, lack of energy, the blahs, blame, complacency
- Anger – fury, frustration, irritation, hostility, hatred, need for revenge
- Fear and anxiety – embarrassment, shame, threat
- Depression – detachment, feeling overwhelmed, helplessness, flight, guilt, disillusionment
- Elation – happiness and relief

Here, and throughout the recovery process, we may also experience physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, sweating, pounding heartbeat, dizziness, crying, breathlessness, dry mouth, or yelling when reminded of or thinking about the trauma.

It is important to understand that all or some of these reactions and emotions can come and go at any time and may last for any period of time and return when we least expect them or when we are triggered by a memory or event. These phases are not linear, and we may experience all or some of them at different times. We may experience them together or individually.

I demonstrated most of the victim symptoms at various times throughout my healing journey. I was often triggered and fell back into the victim mind set.

#### **Shock and denial:**

Sometimes it is hard to believe or understand what has happened to us and why. We avoid the reality, refuse to accept it, and bury our heads in the sand. We look for evidence that this did not happen and is not true, and we either carry on as if nothing happened or we stagnate and our effectiveness and positivity drops.

This stage can have strong benefits, however, as it operates as a defence mechanism, helping us to survive the event and cope with the immediate situation.

The morning after I was raped my first thoughts were, *Was last night real?* I denied and questioned. Why did it happen to me? Why did the rapist come into my space? Why me? I did not fully comprehend the severity of the crime perpetrated against me for the first few days – I refused to accept that it had happened to me. I did not want to confront what being raped meant and the emotions associated with it. I avoided accepting the place where the rape took place.

Years later when I was forced into a retirement that I did not want, I also refused to accept it, believing that they had made a mistake.

This phase is also marked by confusion and shock and horror. When I thought of the rapist, I felt repugnance, disgust, nausea, hysteria.

When I gathered my belongings from the police, I felt revulsion.

I was fearful on my own and gained comfort from my sister or a friend sharing my bed, so that I could get some sleep.

I was numb. I suffered from lack of energy and the blahs. At times I felt so tired that I did not want to do anything. I just didn't care what happened next. I didn't want to go shopping, and communication became difficult as I often felt that people could not understand what I was experiencing.

I blamed myself for not fighting harder when I was attacked. Then I blamed the system, my boss, and my colleagues when I was forced to retire.

I wondered how I was going to go on with my life, and I was fearful that I would not be able to carry on functioning normally.

It happened, and we cannot deny that it happened. If we keep denying the event it can become unhealthy and our life stagnates.

Complacency is sometimes difficult to accept. When we feel that we have healed, that we are okay, that we can readily get on with our lives, and we don't feel that we have to prove anything to anybody, we become complacent. We may even become lazy.

In my case, I was feeling smug about how strong and brave I was (as told to me by so many friends, acquaintances, and strangers). I became self-absorbed in my obsession to change the world.

Later, I lost the ability to learn from the experience by not taking sufficient safety precautions.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Anger:**

Anger can be a powerful remedy to bring us out of denial and back to reality.

When we finally accept what has happened and realisation hits us, we may experience any or all of the anger symptoms.

The depth of our anger may relate to the amount of control we feel we have over the situation. And the focus of our anger may change over time.

I was frustrated that I could not drive my car home; also, at the medical expenses.

I got so angry that I wanted to change the world and lead marches through the streets of Cape Town, and I drew up petitions to get the Constitution changed.

I was angry that my belongings had been damaged.

People giving opinions or suggesting what I should do made me angry.

I was angry that the rapist was sent for psychiatric evaluation.

My anger at the external situation was directed at other people and then moved inwards. Later I was angry at myself for not having taken greater precautions. I felt guilty that I did not know how to fight.

Seeking revenge at this point can be dangerous as we are not thinking rationally. The anger will dissipate, and we will continue through the healing cycle.

It is strange that I did have passing feelings of hatred and the need for revenge at my business partner<sup>12</sup>, but I did not feel hatred towards the rapist.

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<sup>11</sup> See Reflection: A Journey of Recovery and Healing: Yes – It can happen to you

<sup>12</sup> See chapter: Betrayal - Print Works

There were times when I hated myself for my reactions and for having to receive 'charity' from friends who were trying to help me.

### **Fear and Anxiety:**

There may be a time of fear. Fear that things will never be the same again. Fear that we will lose our faith. Fear that we may have to behave in a new or different manner. That we will not be able to act in this new way. Fear that people will see us in a different light.

Shame is when we are hurt, humiliated, or distressed by the opinions of others based on our actions or behaviours.

I was embarrassed at times that people were all talking about the rape; that I felt the need to tell people about the rape; that I was given 'charity'; that people were helping me with my expenses. I felt vulnerable and exposed.

I also felt slightly threatened that I had discovered a side of me that I had not encountered before. This was the need in me to change the world, to lobby, to become an activist. This was a sudden turning point in my life, my 'Road to Damascus'. This was a totally new me and I had no roadmap to follow.

### **Depression:**

Sadness, loss of interest in enjoyable things, and low motivation can lead to depression. Unmanaged, this can lead to what is referred to as a Major Depressive Disorder (MDD).

We may experience one or more of these symptoms or signs of depression. We may:

- Lose our core sense of self with no sense of identity and no clear vision of how to operate
- Feel guilty or feel that we are a bad or unworthy person
- Suffer low moods or lack of energy
- Lose our drive and ambition
- Feel that there is no way out of the situation, and feel overwhelmed, helpless, and lost
- Feel lonely with a belief that nobody is listening or understands
- Become anxious, nervous, or confused
- Suffer from panic attacks
- Give up on others and push them away from us
- Lack motivation
- Suffer from fatigue
- Have trouble falling asleep or waking up or have no desire to leave our beds
- Start clenching our jaws when awake or asleep
- Gain or lose weight and become ill
- Lose interest in sex
- Lose concentration and forget what we were doing or saying
- Experience difficulties in thinking, solving problems or making decisions
- Stop taking care of our appearance and even our cleanliness
- Have a hopeless outlook on life and feel trapped
- Withdraw from people, sports, hobbies, and other things that we love
- Have emotions that run dark and include fear, anxiety, worry, stress, self-judgement, self-doubt, guilt, blame, rage, anger, hostility, and hatred
- Become disillusioned and find that our values and beliefs are no longer compatible with our new world view
- Behave in a zombie-like manner and our activities and speech may slow down

- Turn to drugs, alcohol, or prescription medicine to help us cope
- Wonder what the point is of continuing
- Decline into clinical depression
- Even consider suicide or harming ourselves in some way<sup>13 14</sup>

If there is a benefit to depression it is that it shows us that we have accepted the reality of the situation.

It represents the emptiness we feel as we realise that the situation is in the past and cannot be undone.

I experienced sadness and depression and cried many times. There were so many moments of helplessness, so many times that I felt that I could no longer cope and did not want to carry on. I felt overwhelmed when faced with my damaged belongings, and when people were constantly sympathising and offering gifts and financial aid. At times I wanted to remove myself from situations and people.

Guilt often manifests when we feel that we are not who we thought we were. We consider how we reacted, and we may even question our core beliefs. Some may question how they dressed, their behaviour, the drinking habits, or other decisions. We feel guilty about the choices we made or did not make. The 'what if' or the 'if only' questions often appear in this phase. Mine were 'if only I had not worked late that night' and 'if only I knew how to fight'<sup>15</sup>.

I also felt guilt that I had not attended the rapist's first court appearance.

Two years after I was raped, owing to not having adequately dealing with my emotions, I landed up with psychosomatic back problems that kept me incapacitated for six months<sup>16</sup>.

In this phase, we really need to seek the support of others.

Depending on the severity and depth of our depression we may also need to seek psychological help.

### **Elation, happiness, and relief:**

It is strange of think of happiness at this time.

I was relieved and grateful to be alive.

And when I became aware that most other people had the same anger, the same viewpoint as I had, I had a sense of relief, and even happiness. I did not feel bad about my feelings, and it gave me a sense of anticipation that things would improve.

I was excited that I might be able to have an impact and make changes to the Constitution and to the law. I was elated that I had control over my own life, at the same time as contributing to the improved lives of others.

I was so pleased to get my ring back. I was happy that people spoilt me. I enjoyed being the centre of attention and being called strong and brave.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health/clinical-depression#symptoms>

<sup>15</sup> See chapter: Self Defence and Beautifully Bold

<sup>16</sup> See chapter: Breaking your Back

