

Poems and reflections from women supported by Woman's Trust

30 YEARS woman's Trust
recovery from domestic abuse

Still, she speaks

Content note

This collection includes references to domestic abuse and sexual violence, which some readers may find distressing.

Thank you to all our clients who shared their words, creativity and voices with us.

Thank you to our Ambassadors, artist and activist Antonia (Amja) Lee, and artist Rachel Tansey Chadwick, whose artwork is included in this book.

Cover artwork:
'Ikigai Support' Antonia (Amja) Lee

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Woman's Trust is the leading mental health specialist for women recovering from domestic abuse.

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woman's Trust
recovery from domestic abuse

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Foreword

Thirty years ago, a group of female counsellors and women with lived experience recognised something that few others did: escaping domestic abuse was only the beginning. Women needed specialist support to recover from the lasting impact on their mental health, but they also needed to be heard. They needed their experiences to be recognised, their voices valued and the opportunity to speak out.

This is where Woman's Trust began. It is part of our roots, and it remains at the heart of who we are today. We exist because survivors spoke out, and we continue to create spaces where women, children, and young women and girls can be heard, supported and believed.

This collection brings together some of those voices.

Through poems, thoughts and creative writing, women have shared words that are deeply personal, but which also speak to experiences many will recognise - hope and fear, loss and love, strength and healing, and the courage it can take to find your voice.

There is no single way to tell a story. Sometimes a few carefully chosen words can hold what feels difficult to express. Sometimes writing can offer a place to reflect, to make sense of experience, or simply to be heard.

We are honoured that the women who have contributed to this collection have chosen to share their words with us.

For 30 years, Woman's Trust has believed that healing starts with being heard. These pages are a testament to the power of that belief.

To every woman who has trusted us with her story, and to every woman who has found the courage to put her words on the page: thank you.

30 YEARS woman's Trust recovery from domestic abuse

1. The power of being believed

I remember walking in to see the therapist.
It was the first time someone had said, 'I believe you.'
I broke down crying. I wasn't 'mad'.
This was happening.

In group workshops, I heard other women's stories.
I thought, this abuse is all out of the same rulebook.
It was incredible to hear.

The relief of being believed was transformative.
It felt like a weight lifted. I felt safe. From that point,
I could process what had happened.
I became much stronger.

2. Real Life Angel

With silver hair and eyes so kind and blue,

She held and saw inside what was true.

An angel vanishing that dark shadow cast from the past,

She made every one of us feel home safe at last.

She listened and held us with compassion.

Understood our lives had past in the most difficult fashion.

She soothed our mind and held us still.

Reminded all of us of our core, our own free will.

She was a real-life angel bringing us back to life

Holding us through our troubles and strife

Angel of our hearts and minds

Silver angel with a pure soul... forever incredibly kind.

Written about the group therapist at Woman's Trust, referred to by all the women as a real-life angel.



Woman's Trust

3. *Lifeline*

"Woman's Trust was a lifeline for me.

The support I've received has felt incredibly nurturing, like being held and supported at a time when I needed it most, gently helping me heal, and then gradually strengthening me again, building my confidence so I could step back out into the world at my own pace."

4. No Obligation

He's under no obligation, so he tells

Those who will listen, those who believe the lies he weaves

He's under no obligation to support the wife who devoted two decades to his being

He cut her loose, severed those ties, she is no longer a part of his existence.

She gave her body to bear his children, to grow, birth and feed them

She gave her sleep so he could have his

Her loyalty never wavered despite his rages, she protected his reputation whilst laying waste to her own

She fought his battles and his demons, gave him chance after chance so that he could shine

But he's under no obligation, so he tells

He can destroy her sanity, whilst she still tends his offspring, whilst she ekes out the food to feed those he sired

His world has moved on, to new partners, new cares and behind he leaves her to pick up the pieces, forge unfamiliar paths

She struggles to carry the burden of a life she had carved out of his broken promises and disparate dreams

She wonders how foolish she was to trust her future into his hands.

Her focus remains pinpoint on the needs of their children, their meals, their education, the roof over their heads

But all around he is ripping them down, whilst her fingers bleed with the holding.

He's under no obligation to share the load, to support the structure of his children's world.

He throws bombs whilst she shelters them with her body and mind, but the shrapnel embeds into the depths of her soul.

How long can she shroud them, maintain their stability, whilst his no obligation takes its painful toll?

She remembers all the parts of her gifted and rent, her youth, her love, her trust, her heart

But he's under no obligation. He took and he left.

His money, always his, was the way he provided, unable to proffer his thoughts and care, but now even that has been used as a weapon, to punish, to control, to damage, to express

His contempt, his belittlement, his disregard for her worth, the twenty years gone and they're not coming back.

It was always his money, it was always about the money, not the hours of unpaid labour, not the dedication to family and home, not the sacrificed career she would have forged if she had known for just one moment that he would abandon them like this.

Her entire life, every corner, every routine, every thought and action, every atom of stability and safety has imploded whilst she still wakes up and walks their children through each day with all the love, smiles and trust she can muster from within the devastation she is drowning in.

But he is under no obligation. So he tells.

5. I have a hurricane in me

After experiencing abuse, trauma, severe chronic illness, and disability, I lost far more than my health. I lost my identity, my much-loved business, my physical strength and, in many ways, the family and life I once knew.

What helped me return to life was finding new communities and new family. Through social prescribing, counselling, and my exercise and MMA community,
I found sisters who reminded me that I was still somebody, still worthy, and still deserving of a future.

During some of my darkest moments, I held on to a quote often used by Queen Elizabeth: “I too can command the storm, I have a hurricane in me.” It reminded me that I had lived before, and I could live again.

After becoming paralysed by Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), I made a decision: I would walk, even if it hurt. I returned to the gym, and there I discovered that my strength had never truly left me. Strength training became more than exercise; it became proof that I was still here. Supported by instructors and a community who witnessed the raw reality of my journey, I slowly rebuilt my confidence and belief in myself.

One of the most powerful moments during my recovery came through Woman’s Trust, when I was asked to describe how I felt after counselling in just one word. My word was “clarity.” For the first time, I felt free from the confusion and self-doubt that had followed me for so long.

6. I have life in me yet

Note from the author:

I wrote this when I was coming out of a very dark moment.

Every time I overcome my inner critic, I get a little stronger, a bit wiser, and a bit better at handling it, even if it's 0.01% - it adds up.
I know exactly what it’s like to fall to the floor feeling broken - but if I’m breathing it isn’t over!

Every time I thought I couldn’t do it - I did - you can too, one second, minute, hour, and day at a time.

Hold on
A little longer
Stay strong
Through the fire
Out of the ashes
A phoenix will rise
Trust me when I say
You’ll see the other side
It's gonna be okay
It's gonna be alright
Keep on going
Hope is still in sight
I know this hurts
It hurts like hell
I know you’ve cried
I know you well
I know you are me
And I am you
So therefore I know
That your strength is true
I know you know
This moment will pass
And soon enough
You’ll have this sussed
You’ll figure it out
You always do
This is no exception
To the rule
So hold your head high
And say this with your chest
The best is yet to come
I have life in me yet



7. Genesis 1: 3-5

I lock myself
in the bathroom.
Squeeze
my naked thighs
against the curved edge
of the toilet seat.
The bloody liquid that peeps
between my legs
sighs
releases itself.
You had paused
at the blood spots
splattered outside
the door.
Your shouting and screaming
that thrashed my back
silenced
when I slammed
the door shut.
I rest
on the wooden doughnut shaped
chair
stare
at the dried
curled, cracked torn paper
that edges the top corner of the
ceiling
above the fan
like the discarded band of a
paper party hat.
I step
into my hot pool
fortified by bricks of cast iron
coated with enamel.
Drench my body in warm liquid.
Puddles of blood water
that I have splashed become
vast deep pink rivers
swirling on vinyl tiles.
Tomorrow morning, we will make
amicable conversation.
You will flick words in your
children's faces
(who you will not see for 3 years).
You will beg me
to let you stay
all pimped up in your fresh new
clothes
I will tell you
what I want.
"I want you to leave.
Go"
You will hurry to catch your ride.
I will close the door.
Lean my back against
hardwood.
Let peace
coyly wrap herself around my
body.
I will
make one of those undecided
faltering movements of the lips.
Inhale clean air
exhale gratitude
for countless new days.

8. The Road Home

My endlessly beloved human,
when mists of doubt begin to rise
from hidden caverns of your spirit
and darkness gathers in your eyes,
Then light the candle of a wonder,
let its sacred flame arise,
and place it in the lamp of seeking,
where the path before you lies.
Find your courage, take the journey,
step upon the narrow way,
yet know this road is bound forever
once begun, you cannot stray.
You will walk the woods of treason,
where the wounded spirits cry,
climb the cliffs of cold rejection
where abandoned echoes lie.
You will walk on sands of silence
through the desert's lonely flame,
still believe and keep on walking,
never turn nor curse your name.
When the river of injustice,
dark and raging, deep and wide;
block your pathway, keep your courage,
reach the distant other side.
And beyond that shore, still walking
just a little further on,
you shall reach the endless ocean
of eternal truth and light.
Do not fear its roaring waters,
do not flee its burning glow
mighty waves of blazing fire
will lift your soul forever higher.
They will bear you through heavens,
where endless stars above
guide you to the distant island
of the everlasting love.
And upon that sacred pier,
free at last from fear and roam,
you will know within your spirit
you are finally back HOME.

9. Freedom

I felt like a failure
I felt behind in life
I felt trapped
I felt unseen
I felt weak and stuck on my knees
I felt like I let my younger self down
Now I know that's not true because I survived
Little me is proud to know I did what I could do
With what I knew and continuously fought through.
Now I'm free
Free to breathe
Free to be me
Free to feel
Free to heal
Free to be heard and seen
No longer confined like a caged bird
My untold stories finally being heard
I'm free.

10. Behind the Blur

And just like that, we became brand new. New versions of our former selves.

We became brand new until our identity got blurred, encapsulated in what we taught ourselves to accept.

Fitting in the fitting. Stuck inside the walls of that box. Compressed until our form changed.

No place to go other than to seep through the cuboid jointing.

The essence of ourselves spewed and permeated the ether, trying to recapture the elements that had made self great.... And that's how the reformation of our new original came to pass; the identity reappearing from behind the blur.

11. To Every Survivor

"As a survivor of coercive control and domestic abuse, and someone who has continued to experience abuse after separation for many years, I would like to share a few words with anyone who may be walking a similar path.

For years, I thought survival meant staying quiet and being agreeable. I believed that if I stayed strong enough or waited long enough, it would eventually end. I believed the court process would eventually put things right for me. It did not.

If there is one thing I wish someone had told me sooner, it is this: please do not blame yourself. What happened to you is not your fault. Becoming a victim of abuse is never a reflection of your intelligence, strength or worth.

You may feel that nobody truly understands what you are going through. I did too. I kept everything to myself because I thought I simply had to cope.

Please do not make the same mistake. Reach out for help. It may take time to find the right support, but it is there. For me, Woman's Trust became one of those places. For the first time, I met women who understood the invisible impact of coercive control. Their understanding reminded me that I was not alone.

Healing does not happen overnight, but it does happen.

One day, you will notice that the voice guiding your choices is no longer your abuser's.

It is yours.

And that is where freedom begins."



12. A Sisterhood of Lions

As lions we will stand as a pride
together and roar,

A strength of inner spirit so collective
you have never seen before.

We run with strides of power into the
vast plains of streets before us.

We hold invisible arms and hands
interlocking this truss.

As lions we whisper loudly a deafening
truth of surviving and going on.

We sing to the clouds, the land and the
heavens that we together belong.

We stood on days when standing was
nearly taken,

We pulled off the impossible so our
breath was not forsaken.

We are a sisterhood of pride brave lions
with scars and broken bones.

We gave up many things, so in debt,
with impossible to ever pay loans.

But we have won freedom and strength
against all the odds.

So we hold together the world and all of
the other worldly gods.

13. Boundaries

When I saw the Woman's Trust offering a workshop on boundaries I knew I had to go. I knew my boundaries were weak. You see, when I was a young woman, I'd been beaten up by my husband. Back then in the early '90s there was little or no support, the police wouldn't get involved in 'domestics'. I left the relationship a couple of years later but carried trauma for many years. Setting boundaries was unsafe for me.

In my 60s I experienced domestic violence again. The warning signs were there but I didn't recognise them. I went away on holiday with my 'loving' partner of 6 years. His behaviour became unhinged and I was accused of 'bad behaviour'. When I smiled or chatted to any other man or simply looked around with curiosity, I was accused of flirting. During the holiday he bullied me, I was disrespecting him. I felt threatened and went into survival mode, the abuse escalated, he raped me.

He started pushing me about, pulling me by my hair, he stole my passport to prevent my escape and control me, but this was in a public space and witnessed. He stormed off, threatening me with further violence. Two women were watching; they approached and offered help. They recognised that he was abusing me. With their help I fled the country and got home safely.

I sought out help when I got home as I was unwell: traumatised, terrified, shaking, asthmatic and carrying an infection. I needed treatment from doctors first; it was Christmas and difficult to access. As soon as I told them what happened, they helped and advised reporting it to the police.

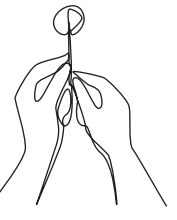
Because it's a crime, I was given victim support, they said I was at high risk of further harm. They helped me to get safe and explained domestic abuse. They helped me banish him from my life. I received their help for 6 months and I am enormously grateful, it was invaluable.

They signposted me to the Woman's Trust, and I discovered their workshops. There was one on Creative Writing, and below is the poem I wrote there.

A phoenix rising out of the ashes, looking for the lush and lovely places, igniting flames over the abusers, standing up to the stubborn stupid snakes.

Oh, the balm of the cool quiet waters, never again! I rise and I nurture.

14. Hidden Voice



The world has been waiting for her side of the story

Her voice, her vision, her wisdom

She has a lot to say, a lot to show, a lot to share

For years she was robbed of her precious voice

Forced to walk into her already sore tippy toes

Imprisoned in her own mind, unable to think, talk or complain

But she waited and waited and waited

Knowing her voice was only maturing in silence

Her words waiting to spread Wonder Worldwide

Like a baby in her mother's womb

Protected by Devine safe and solid walls

She grew despite every shout, shame and blame

Like the planted seed, she fed from the dirty soil

Nourishing from the hidden nutrients of Mother Earth

And blessed waters of her rainy eyes

She grew stronger and stronger and stronger

Away from the world she was once cut off

Knowing that her buried voice and wisdom will soon sprout

Now she is telling her story

This time holding the power in her hand



15. What if losing your voice could give you a new way of seeing the world?

I have found myself staring at my laptop for a while, thoughts swirling, yet none quite ready to be shaped in words. Winter is here, and with it comes cosy movie nights with a warm drink, afternoons filled with a heartfelt and moving story to read by the fire, a golden latte cradled at my side, and the room alive with the comforting smell of cinnamon.

But winter also brings the cold and the flu and all the symptoms that come with them, and I have been fortunate to catch them all. On top of that, my vocal cords have also been affected, and I have not been able to talk for the last few days.

At first, I felt the familiar tug of frustration - my voice, and a part of myself, absent from the world around me.

Without the constant flow of conversation and with some time off from work to recover, I found myself with more time to reflect. I began to notice how much I needed that. Thoughts and emotions I might have otherwise drowned out with distractions started to unfold, and the silence created space for me to reconnect with myself. How often do we sit in silence, truly at ease, and allow ourselves to process what we're feeling or thinking?

Not being able to talk made me think outside the box about how to communicate. But more importantly, it gave me the opportunity to become a listener in conversations. How often do we, in the rush to respond, forget to just listen? How much do we miss when silence holds the space instead of speech?

Not being able to use words, made me more observant of how other people interact, how a conversation fills the gap between silence, and how expressions and gestures can speak volumes. I was touched by how family and friends adapted, including me in conversations without expecting a verbal reply.
A glance, a smile or even a light touch means more than words ever could –
You're here, and I'm grateful for it.

I have developed my body language in ways I never thought about before.
A nod, or a smile - it's incredibly powerful how much can be said without a single word. Silence is not an absence but a presence with understanding and intent.

Sometimes, losing something - like our voice - can help us find something more profound: the beauty of listening and the subtle power of actions.

16. I Speak

I speak for the survivor in me, I represent my connection to the strength that has grown out of the weakness in me.

I am speaking for the silent parts of me, which are no longer hidden, and are far from quiet, as she's found her way out and rooted herself in the voice that speaks before you.

I speak for the current me, who is burning the old version of the person, who's been living underneath me, as she's never felt good enough for any other being, but now she feels more than enough for me.

I speak for the courage in me, who stood out bravely to step into the inner being of the truthful me.

I speak for the fighter in me, who went to war with herself to fight for the peace in me.

I speak for the liberated me, as she now stands firmly grounded and far from the victim of abuse that she was, for years suffering.

I speak for the released prisoners in me, who had her hands tied behind her, with her back against the wall, now whose words are untying her and releasing her back into the freedom of me.

I speak for the love in me, many times had her heart broken, now to become a masterpiece, showing ways of love that I never thought would be possible to me.

Now I speak for the survivor in you, you have the power too.

To turn your wounds into scars of beauty marks on your skin, you stood up for, no matter how many times you left and went back.

All that matters is your here and now and that is what you should be most proud of and feel happy that you chose you.

17. Stay on the line

She was so exhausted from the fight,
It had taken terror and all of her might.
Her trust was worn so thread-thin bare,
Could she believe that anyone would care?
She held her phone in her hand,
Was there really some safe port where she can land?
She held her breath as she dialled,
She felt like her hiding, frightened child.

She nearly ended the call before it even began,
Still time for her to pretend that never for her life ran.
But somewhere inside was a drop of faith, hope,
And she knew she needed help of how to cope.

She held the line and held her breath.
Channelling that bravery that saved herself from death.
"Hello" said the voice so kind and calm.
Finally now she was in someone's caring, safe arm.

She held the line and let in trust.....
The voice so assuring, caring, kindness a must.
She knew they were a safe pair of hands,
Thinking "Let go girl this is finally dry warm land".

She would again and again visit the place of this kind voice.
Always remembering it was the bravest, best - ever choice.
She let in the compassionate understanding that she deserved.
Moving one step forward to a better life with every word.



About the Artists

Rachel Tansey Chadwick

"I hope this book will give those of you that read it a flavour of this truly remarkable community that is the Woman's Trust.

During my first therapy group with the Woman's Trust after leaving an abusive relationship, I began to explore activities that I had left behind a long time ago such as writing poetry, drawing and painting.

Trees are powerful, natural and often connect to the world and living creatures around them in different ways. They seem to be a mirror to all things human. Their leaves, trunks, branches and bark often showing the scars of time but also new growth and hope.

By drawing the trees during my healing, they seemed to be a mirror of me and my life. Showing hardship, trauma, courage, endurance, resilience, loss, change and hope of a new beginning."

Antonia (Amja) Lee

"These and my other works remind me that art can hold what conversation sometimes cannot. Woman's Trust gave me language, therapeutic support and the space to begin trusting myself again. My art is one of the ways I pass that forward, using creativity to open difficult conversations and create space for others to see and understand their own experiences differently.

I cannot give another woman my journey, nor would I want to. But perhaps I can create something that gives her a moment of recognition.

And sometimes, that moment is enough to begin."

Amja Unabashedly™
Where Art Becomes Your Strategy

Still, she speaks

Poems and reflections from women supported by Woman's Trust

Woman's Trust is the leading mental health specialist for women recovering from domestic abuse.

For 30 years, it has addressed trauma and helped rebuild lives long after the violence ends.

Woman's Trust relies on our supporters to fund our life-saving and life-changing work. Please scan the QR code to donate today at https://www.justgiving.com/charity/womanstrust

SCAN ME

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