



EXPLORARE

FIRST

SEXUAL

EXPERIENCES

**A book to encourage
conversations about sex and
relationships**

Kate Tregan Rowe

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Introduction

This book is the first in a series of free resources available to parents and adults who work with children and teens. This is a book for people who know it is important and necessary to change how we speak, teach and facilitate conversations about sex and relationship. It is a resource for people who are open and willing to be part of this ever-evolving conversation. My vision is to share how we at Explorare believe things can be. To share real life stories which support our perspectives and to encourage conversations about what we feel is the really important stuff.

We live in a world which is dominated by information accessible at the click of a button, people who themselves had little, if any, sex education, and those who are stuck in old ways of talking or rather not talking about sex, pleasure and desire. I choose to be a voice which is inviting a new way, a new possibility.

My commitment is to the children who are currently in my life, especially my two beautiful God daughters, I want them to have a different reference to their sexuality than what I experienced and currently see as being shared or not shared with children, tweens and teens. I see shame, worry and silence more often than I see joy, acceptance, authentic communication and honest sharing.

Here is my motivation.

I want children and teens to know their sexuality is part of them and it is sacred. To know there is always an adult willing to cultivate safe emotional relationships which allows for anything to be spoken.

We have asked people to share with us what they consider to be their first sexual experience.

Each person's story is unedited and in their original voice. All stories are anonymous, names and places have been changed.

Thank you for being courageous.
Thank you for reading this book.

Thank you

We feel the stories within this book are courageous gifts from the writers and we hold them precious.

We value and thank them for their willingness to be part of changing the conversation around sex, sexuality, intimacy, relating and connection.

With our deepest gratitude,
Kate and Lorie

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author, Kate Tregan Rowe. Assumptions made in the analysis are not reflective of the position of any other entity other than the Author – and since we are critically thinking human beings, these views are always subject to change and revision and rethinking at any time. Please do not hold us to them in perpetuity.

Please be aware the activities, thoughts and theories in this book are not designed or intended to replace psychotherapy or be a form of therapy. Its intention is to begin conversation and invite a new perspective.

If you feel the emotions expressed by your child or teenager or felt by yourself are too intense for you to manage healthily, we strongly advise you to seek professional help. Positive support comes in many forms and is primarily non-judgmental and caring. You might get it from a loving family member or somebody in your religious or spiritual community. It could be a friend to lean on or a stranger with smarts and a degree in social psychology. If you have a history of mental illness or suspect you might suffer from one, please first consult a mental health professional before attempting any of these activities with youngsters.

Why this book

I would have found a book like this one to be supportive when I was growing up. It could have helped me make better choices about having sex and any other interactions in the sexual realm. It may have opened the opportunity for me to ask questions and speak about some of the things I was worried or curious about.

If someone, and by that I mean an adult, had the wisdom and the support to step out of society's shame and shaming they could have spoken to me of the beauty and the power of desire, shared their knowledge and reflections about the changes I was experiencing in my life, then the journey I had been on could have been different.

I wish someone had taken the time to support me to enquire a little deeper, taught me the skills to identify and become aware of my feelings, and to listen and understand the messages they were trying to tell me. Is this what I really wanted? Was I being cherished and loved as I explored the desires in me with another or even with myself?

If only there had been one adult, one grown up person who I felt was willing to have an open, accepting conversation with me.

One adult who went out of their way to cultivate trust and had a willingness to speak frankly and honestly about sex and all it involves and how it connects us.

If one adult had spoken to me about pleasure instead of insinuating shame and guilt for my desires. If the words were, "Come let's talk about this" instead of "Stop it, don't do that", or just silence. Much of my confusion, the feelings of powerlessness and feeling out of my depth may have been less.

Please don't misunderstand; I feel these first explorations are always going to present children and teens with challenges, just as I feel sexuality invites us as adults to explore more of who we are.

I am not saying it all would have been idyllic and I would never have made any bad choices. I am saying given the opportunity to talk openly about what I was struggling with or have a conversation about how some of my experiences made me feel that support would have radically changed my life.

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All it takes is one adult to make a difference.

One adult to be courageous and open.

This book is where I stand up and be the adult who is willing to speak without shame about sex, my first sexual experiences, pleasure and desire. This is me, living my commitment to encourage people to make sexuality part of their everyday lives and not something we perceive as separate which needs to be hidden away.

This book is a platform where I share my perspectives and speak about what many people won't speak about. My hope is it becomes a resource to support you when having conversations which may be challenging.

We are taking conversations about sex out of the naughty corner and inviting our sexuality into the light, into clarity and integrating it in our lives.

Shame cannot exist in the presence of intimacy, openness and acceptance.

Shame slinks away from light and light is brought to experiences and thoughts when we are willing to share what we are feeling and experiencing. This can only happen if we have supportive connection and have developed emotional safety.

Perspective shift

What if we asked teens how they would like to feel in their relationships and how they would like to feel in their sexual experiences instead of telling them what to do or what not to do? What if we started asking them what they desire instead of telling them certain desires are not okay?

What would happen then?

Every choice we make is linked to how we are feeling. We need to incorporate what we feel and how we want to feel into our daily conversations and especially into the conversation about sex and relationships.

This book is a catalyst to open conversations about what we want and what we don't want from our sexual experiences and intimate relationships. If we know what we desire and how we would like to feel, we create the space for clearer choices. This is an opportunity to explore this perspective for yourself and with the children in your life.

It is an invitation to have conversations about sex and relationships. Society shies away from speaking about these topics and assumes we (and children) will magically have the knowledge on how to interact with our own and another's sexuality. Currently I see very little support and preparation for these experiences.

“I believe pleasure is a stronger motivator than fear. Knowing what we want to feel and experience is more influential in our decision making than threats, pornography and silence.”

Let's invite teens into conversations about what they want their relationships and first experiences to be.

Let's start asking them what they feel and what they would like to feel.

Imagine what could happen then.

What we noticed

Many people were hesitant to share their story even though they knew all stories were going to remain anonymous. This hesitancy shifted once connection was established and they felt they could trust us to receive their story with respect and hold it sacred.

So often we are judged and shamed for our sexual experiences that it is essential to create safe emotional spaces which allow us to speak about these experiences. It is wise to be discerning with whom we share these intimate stories. And yet I believe it is important that each and every one of us has a safe space where we can speak about our first sexual experiences and the impact these had on our lives.

The longer we keep our sexuality locked away and separated from ourselves and our children the less time we have to change the way our children are educated about sex and relationships. We need to talk openly about all aspects of our sexuality with people we know and trust.

Our sexuality is not separate from us. It is part of us, always.

The writing of this book confirmed what we knew, emotional safety and connection are key if we are going to feel okay sharing and talking about sexuality and relationships.

Kate's story

“We have nothing to be ashamed about when we share the stories about our first sexual or any sexual experiences.”

The above sentence was a statement I made in a video I posted online. Immediately after I shared it I felt to challenge myself on the truth of this statement for myself. Was I being honest or did I still feel some shame about my first sexual experience and the choices I had made?

This led me to I decide to share my story without it being anonymous. Right here at the beginning of the book.

The initial feelings which arose in me were feelings of nervousness and apprehension.

I sat, I felt, I listened.

Was I nervous because I felt ashamed of my experience?

No.

So what was it?

I felt I needed a few things to be in place for me to feel 100% okay to share it, here, on this platform.

I needed to feel the center of my being as solid. I needed to dig deep to enquire if I had felt through all the feelings which were linked to the experience.

I knew I had the support of the people who love me; the people in my life who are my friends, my protectors and avid supporters.

Okay, I felt ready. I was going to share my story.

But wait . . . more feelings arose as soon as I had boldly declared I was ready.

I sat again (yes another emotional check in) and questioned, “How did I feel now about sharing my story?”

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I noticed a subtle feeling. I was not able to name it at first.

There was a sensation of forcing myself. It had the tone of violation.

What had triggered this I asked myself?

The word to describe it was unease. There was a sense of wariness about the choice I was making. I was clear it was not linked to any shame I felt about my experience so what was triggering these feelings?

It was in the writing of the below paragraph the door opened to the message behind those feelings.

“Please do not assume I am advocating everyone goes out and shares on public platforms experiences which are intimate, private and tender. Please be discerning with whom you share your stories. The reason I am choosing to share my story on this public forum is because I am passionate about the necessity for more communication; intimate, raw and vulnerable connection with each other. I trust this will allow for different conversations to begin.”

As I wrote this I had to ask myself if I was being discerning about where and who I was sharing my story with. In truth I was not.

Then how could I make that statement if I was not doing it myself?

Time to look deeper, more reflection and yes, another emotional check in.

I asked myself this question:

Why did I want people to be discerning with their stories?

The answer was so simple.

I see people, their bodies, their sexual experiences (any intimate experience really) as sacred. We have beautiful, delicate and robust inner aspects to ourselves which are valuable and precious. We need to treat them that way. Sharing my story here felt like I was flinging it into the world to prove a point, “See I have no shame.”

However, with the understanding of my sacredness, the knowledge my body and my experiences are precious; it did not feel like I was in alignment with myself if I simply flung my story out into the world.

If I did, I would not have been taking care of myself.

It was the swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction from the silence and shame I feel we need to address. It was still reactionary.

Through this enquiry I know myself to be completely open to share my story with people who will honour my experience and sharing here in the beginning of the book did not feel discerning. Therefore, my story is back in the book as one of the anonymous stories.

I choose to cultivate the concept that we are sacred and deserve to be cherished. The whole of us. Every inch of our bodies, hearts and minds deserve to be cherished. We are precious.

I deserve to have deep, authentic, intimate and caring connections which feed my soul. So, do you. So, do your children.

I am committed to making choices which communicate clearly my intrinsic value, simply by being me.

I am a person who models to those around me how precious my body, how treasured my heart and valued my mind are. This means, to the best of my ability, I do not make choices which bring me harm.

Although my story is included with the others in this book and remains anonymous I would like to share my reflections on some of the themes that played out in my first sexual experience. These themes are not unique to me. I have witnessed them in many people's lives.

1. I believed I was not good enough.
2. I was desperate to belong. The need to belong influenced so many of my choices.
3. I did not know how to pay attention to my emotions and thus did not know how to listen to their messages.

4. I was seeking connection. The connection I truly wanted was not to be found in these experiences.
5. I related my body and sex to my internal worth. If someone desired me sexually I had value. It is overtly insinuated by society that if we look a certain way we have more value. If someone desires us and thinks we are attractive or beautiful we have more value than someone who is not.
6. I had learnt how to trade sex for what I wanted without anyone ever “teaching” me. Even as a young teenager I understood I could use sex as a bargaining tool.
7. I had no safe adult to speak to nor did I feel I had an emotionally safe relationship I could lean into and talk about what had happened to me. It was not that I needed the experience to be different; rather, I was impacted because I did not have an emotionally safe relationship where I could express what had happened and what I was feeling about it.

This experience influenced me. Yours will influence you.

How to use this book

Where you can start

We need to start talking about sex. About our first times. All of our first times. Discovering how we want to feel and what we would like our sexual experiences to be. This exploration is not limited to and does not stop with our first sexual experience. As we grow we explore intimacy with the same partner or new partners and our desires grow and change. Although this book has been created to support you to have more open conversations with your children, it starts with you as an adult acknowledging what it is you want.

We recommend to the adult using this book answer the questions below.

It is much easier to communicate in a connected, authentic and empathetic manner when you have explored a topic yourself. Your first step is to cultivate an awareness of how you felt about your first experience.

1. What do you consider to be your first sexual experience?
2. What do you remember about how you felt?
3. Did you have a safe relationship with an adult where you could talk about your experiences either before or after they occurred?
4. How would you like your sexual experiences to be now, even if you have been in a long-term relationship or marriage? The invitation is to feel deeply about how you would like the next experience of intimacy or sex with your partner to be.
5. How do you feel in this moment about the intimacy in your life? It is useful to note when I refer to intimacy here I speak of all its facets, not only sexually.
6. We are evolving and changing all the time. We have new experiences; our ideas and perspectives shift and change; this does not stop when you are in a relationship. If you as the adult find yourself saying you want your next sexual experience to be as it was the last time you made love, I highly recommend digging a little deeper and letting your imagination travel to what may be possible in your next experience of love-making. Our capacity to dive into

connection and intimacy is only limited by our own belief that there is a ceiling to how deeply we can feel.

Remember for you to be able to speak about this with children you need to know where you stand and what you feel. Otherwise you will be unable to speak with authenticity. If you are unable to speak with authenticity you will find it very difficult to connect in a way which has impact or is believable. Your superpower in these conversations is your willingness to show up and be vulnerable; to be able to connect with where the child is at. So please take a moment to answer the questions and read the stories. Think not only of what you would wish for the children in your care or sphere of influence, but also what you wish for yourself.

We recommend writing what you would consider to be your own first sexual experience and when you had penetrative sex for the first time. You do not need to show anyone or tell anyone, it will simply give you an opportunity to reflect. This is essential. How will you be able to support children in this conversation if you are not willing to look, reflect and unpack your own experience?

If you have someone you trust and feel emotionally safe with share your stories with them. Notice what feelings arise in this process.

Remember emotional safety is an essential key for any and all conversations which require us to show up, be vulnerable and share feelings which can be tender. Many fears and big feelings can arise in these conversations. Children today are faced with many of the same things we experienced except now, I believe, it is magnified and multiplied with the pace of the world and how quickly we can access information. Pornography also plays a part in creating ideas which are not realistic for our children. In truth we do not and cannot yet fully comprehend the impact this highly sexualised and visual online world is having on our children or even on us as adults.

I believe the emotional worries and stressors which are at core in many interactions are the same ones we adults faced when we were growing up; the need to belong, feeling strong sexual desires, how to cope with rejection, how to say no and knowing what our personal boundaries are.

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For those adults now, who grew up without access to the internet, if you wanted to know what a boy or a girl looked like naked you had to find a friend who shared the same curiosity. Now all you need to do is Google it. And not only will you get images of naked people; you can watch many forms of sex and lots of it.

The natural pace of curious discovery has been replaced by “Just Google it”. This means instead of sensing and discovering natural boundaries with each other, children today are bombarded with information which skews their ideas of sex and is not the complete picture.

Pornography is not sex education nor are articles in many popular mainstream magazines.

Sit for a few minutes and try to imagine the implications of your first reference to sex being a pornographically styled video rather than through curious exploration with another person. Children will seek out, get shown, or accidentally stumble upon videos and images on their phones or the internet. This will happen. These influences can become the reference point of how they interact with each other.

Let your mind and heart consider the impact of this.

If you do not give children an understanding that there are other ways to interact, have sex and to be intimate they will assume this is the only way.

Many people I have spoken to have expressed the concern that if they talk to children about sex, pleasure, or desire they are going to want to go out and do it more.

Let me take this moment to say I think this is utter nonsense. In fact, I feel the opposite is true. Accurate age-appropriate information and the space to talk things through, to unpack and learn more about who we are, how we feel about different things, and what we want, leads to better decision making and choices.

When children make a choice you believe is not the best option, and they will, they are growing and learning, then having access to a safe emotional

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relationship where they can discuss how they feel and what they would like to do differently next time is essential in supporting them to make better decisions.

When was the last time you went for more than a week without making a choice you would choose to do differently next time? Children need to know if they make a choice that wasn't okay for them there is a safe place to speak about it. A place to receive the support needed to process the experience, identify what was okay for them, and what was not, and what choice they would like to make next time.

For you as the adult

1. Write your story
2. Take time to reflect on your story using the questions below
3. If you have a safe emotional relationship/connection with someone share your story with them
4. Then write another first time story
5. Take time to reflect
6. Then write another story

Questions for reflection

There is a feelings list at the back of the book which is very useful to help you identify your own feelings through this process. When we can accurately name our feelings; we reduce the intensity of the feelings. Naming your feelings is a useful tool to share with children.

1. How did you feel writing your story?
2. What were the emotions you felt before, during and after this experience?
3. What did you like or not like about the experience?
4. Is there something you would like to have felt instead?
5. What would you like to feel again?
6. What would you not like to feel again?
7. Would you like the children in your life to have an experience like you had?

8. What feelings would you like to experience in your next sexual interaction?

Discussions with children

Please note there are many different questions and discussion you may want to explore with your children. We cannot nor will we ever presume how these discussions may start and what they will cover. What we do encourage is the cultivation of relationships where you can have conversations about anything.

Here are some questions which are useful no matter the situation or circumstance.

1. Can you identify how you felt in that situation? (use the feelings list at the back of the book)
2. What do you think those feelings are trying to tell you?
3. What did you like or not like about the experience?
4. What would you like to be different next time?
5. What would you rather feel instead?

If you are talking about a specific experience they consider being a sexual experience you can keep in mind these questions

- Can you identify your emotions?
 - o What do you think your emotions are trying to tell you?
- What did you like or not like about the experience?
- For your next sexual experience what would you like it to be?
 - o What would you like to feel? Feelings, pleasure, orgasms, connected, safe?
- What would you like to feel again?

The stories

001

Way too young!

And like my birth into this world, my transformation from virgin to non-virgin, was without reverence, honour or sacredness . . .

From the age of ten, I misplaced my need for attention and need to be loved in the hands of my best friend's brother. Literally. I can remember having my little boob buds fondled whilst on the couch watching TV. And so it made sense, three years later to lose my virginity to him - or so it seemed at the time. On a three week holiday away in KwaZulu Natal, with my best friend, her brother and his best friend and one chaperoning dad. I was thirteen years old.

I cannot begin to tell you how I knew to flirt or how I even knew to use my new found sense of sexuality. I honestly can't even say that I knew what I was getting myself into. What I do know is there was a sense of power over these two boys, both seventeen. I remember being very aware they responded to whatever it was I was doing, whatever that may have been.

And so one night I followed him to the ablution block of the caravan park we were holidaying in and bravely followed him into the men's bathroom, into one of the bath stalls with its lockable door. I followed blindly. Retrospectively, I learned that although I had an understanding of the biological act of making a baby, I did not in any way associate it with the act of sex as a connecting and intimate act between two people. People are so busy yelling that we must teach teens and children how babies are made – but did anyone stop to think to teach teenagers about the sacredness of love-making? Or teach them the art of it, with all of its emotional undertones and physical pleasure?

Instead, with my absurdly grown up sexuality, trapped inside a young thirteen year old mind and body, I lay down with this young man on the cold concrete floor while he did what he needed to do. No intimacy. No sacredness. No joy. Pleasure? I'm not sure. I don't remember. I just remember his semen on the floor beneath me, where he ejaculated after having pulled out in time so that I didn't get pregnant (there's that focus on making babies again!) On completion, he did help me up to my feet. I scuttled off to the girl's bathroom to clean up and just like that, I was no longer a virgin.

My mother knew I wasn't a virgin any longer because like all good things teenage related, without loving guidance, one believes one is immune and knows everything. I proceeded to sleep with another boy who proceeded to tell all his friends. In a nutshell, it was told to my mom, and then dad, and hey presto – at age fourteen, I moved schools due to the disgrace.

I was sixteen when I eventually told my mother my virginity was actually broken six months prior to the school incident. Her response, "Well, what's done is done. No good crying over spilt milk".

I was twenty-one when I wrote to my friend's brother and shared with him my realisations in retrospect. I wrote how I understood it was actually statutory rape and that he'd taken advantage of me. Yes, I'd thrown myself at him. I was thirteen though. And I was his sister's best friend. I was also his friend. And the beautiful thing – he replied. He replied to me with honesty and love. He took complete ownership and responsibility for his actions and expressed his regret it had happened. That was one of the most healing letters I've ever received.

Twenty-eight years later, on my 41st birthday, I had the opportunity to replace all of that old wounding and past experience when I got to be a "virgin" again – and made love with my now life partner. This incredible woman I am now with created the most sacred and safe space for us to unite and merge as lovers, in an environment that was private, special and infinitely honouring of the sacred act of love-making. What transpired were multiple layers of healing, deep inner sexual awakening and truth, and a new base point from which I can now reference true sacred love-making.

I can do this now for my growing daughters and guide them as needed, as to what love-making can and should be about. I am now blessed with having healed my past and any potential programming I could have passed onto my daughters. And instead, my life partner and I created a new future of sexuality and love for ourselves and my daughters, which sets us all up for healthier views, experiences and beliefs pertaining to being sexual women.

002

I couldn't remember if it was the first sexual experience ... which is kind of hazy ... but with many girls I guess your first time having sex is the most vivid sexual memory, so here goes ...

I had an affair with a man twice my age for over seven years. No one in my family knows nor do any of my close friends. The only people I have really talked to about it are my husband and one of my best friends.

It started when I was seventeen and because of the nature of his job and my being a student, well, no one could know and the relationship involved a lot of spy craft and meeting in odd out of the way places. He gave me my first of many, many orgasms long before we ever had sex in the back of his truck.

I would ride my mountain bike somewhere out in the woods to the end of the trail on a road and he would pick me up and we would drive up into the mountains and spend the day eating, napping, talking and being with each other. To be honest, most of the time was spent with me learning my body and him using his fingers and touch to teach me; he was a great teacher.

He talked about his first time, and how as a boy growing up in northern Italy, an older woman helped him to discover his body and how to discover a woman's body. He used to talk about it then like what we were doing was kind of paying it forward.

I remember one conversation we had, about love which he said was separate from sex, which my adolescent brain didn't really comprehend. I knew I loved him in a way, at the time I couldn't have possibly understood, but we talked existentially about love for hours and it came out that he was failing at not falling in love with me; and that he did love me.

But when we were together at this point sex didn't go past touching and kissing, until shortly after my 18th birthday as it had to be legal, because if anyone ever found out ... well, it would have destroyed us both.

He took me to the doctor for my first ever gynecological exam which was somewhat awkward for him, as I imagine I was so nervous about it all that he waited with me in the waiting room. We got some very strange looks. Then I went in and had the exam with the most awful person.

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She asked me if I slept with women because if I did she wouldn't give me the exam, and then without asking she gave me five boxes of birth control pills, and that was that. When we left the building he immediately took the boxes out of my hand and threw them in the trash and told me that I wouldn't need them. This shocked me at first.

We waited for two weeks for my test results to come back, and after I was given a clean bill of health, we talked about sex; my feelings on it and his. This was when I found out he had had a vasectomy so hence my no need for my birth control pills.

I organised a solo backpacking trip across to an island near where we lived. There was a campground across that way I could get to and he could take the ferry across and get to it easily as well.

At the time I didn't have enough money for a tent and I didn't think to ask him for one, so I bought an emergency tarp. I had a sleeping bag and everything else. I found an out of the way campsite with two trees I would tie a string between and set up my tent.

I was so nervous and excited, and I waited and waited and waited for him to arrive. Once he did, I made up lunch, I can't remember what exactly, and we crawled into my make-shift tent with a rather uncomfortable root running right underneath the sleeping bag.

I don't remember exactly what happened. I took his shirt off, and he took mine off, and we played with each other, and lay naked for a while. I do remember he wouldn't let me touch him and that 100% attention on me was amazing.

When we finally had sex and he was inside me it was the strangest feeling, painful yet amazing, secret and forbidden, cliché I know but the truth.

He moved inside me so slowly and I came so quickly. I didn't know it at the time but he didn't have an orgasm. In the seven plus years we were together he only ever had one orgasm with me (again in a tent on the same island but four years later). He pulled out of me, and we were both out of breath, he put his finger inside me and asked me if I was tender, and I was, I was for a few days after actually!

I'm not sure how long we lay there naked and covered up in my sleeping bag. He asked me how it was and how I felt and all I could say was "Odd". My mind was so full of questions and pondering and everything that the only thing I could come up with was "Odd" which felt terrible saying but it's what I said.

Needless to say he used it as a teasing point for many months and years afterwards.

We eventually got dressed and sat on the beach watching the birds, and then in one heartbreaking moment he said he had to leave; we had never discussed what was going to happen after, but I had assumed he was going to stay with me, but he didn't.

So I sat on the beach and watched him leave on the ferry and cried and cried and cried trying to figure out the magnitude of what had happened. I kept thinking that he had gotten what he wanted and I would never see him again. But that was not the case at all.

I have never gotten out of him why he left, then again I've never really asked.

We texted all night. Me in my make-shift tent in the middle of the woods. Him somewhere else.

Our relationship continued for a tumultuous six and a half more years.

I would consider my first sexual experience with the opposite sex to be an encounter with a boy between prep break at hostel. I was about thirteen, he was fifteen. In the dark, hiding around the side of the hall he wanted me to touch his penis. I remember reaching for it and not even having a clue on how to hold it, to which he said "hold it like a lollipop", from that sage wisdom I clearly got something right and managed to fumble my way through that experience.

It left me feeling inadequate and less than good enough. There was also this desire in me to please and do better next time. This sad state I have realised is encouraged in us from young girls, to please other people. To put other people before myself, I have never, ever in any areas of my life found this to be the wisest choice.

The next time we (same boy) were in the dark on the field, me with the idea in my mind that I needed to please him and give him what he wanted, in the ten minute break in prep time. This time we took it to the next level (please note that in all of these stories my pleasure, what I wanted, what I needed and was comfortable with was not a thought in my -or his- mind). So this time he wanted a blow job. Being the girlfriend that wanted to please and keep this boyfriend I shut down any of my feelings and took his penis in my mouth, not that I can remember any of this. The only part I remember was the shock, the horror and the absolute disgust that I felt when he ejaculated in my mouth.

The bell to return for prep rang. He promptly pulled up his pants and ran up the stairs leading off the field.

I on the other hand felt physically sick, tears streaming down my face. Trying to hold down the desire to vomit, I climbed up the stairs, wiped my eyes, and pretended everything was okay, when it was anything but okay

004

My first time, it was my first real boyfriend.

I was sixteen, he eighteen and had his own car, which we parked somewhere quiet one night. We both jumped in the back seat and after much fumbling about we were both naked and realised which bits needed to connect.

After not very long I recall him saying, "Have you cum yet? You should have cum by now" . . . I didn't even know what he was talking about.

I remember waking up the next morning with a neck full of hickeys, mum giving me the look and me thinking, "Oh, well . . . that's that" . . .

. . . Awful looking back . . .

005

Thank you for asking this question. For me it reminded me of a feeling I had almost forgotten

It was my first sexual buzz. It was sitting in class next to a boy and I was about eight.

We were sitting side by side in class and our legs accidentally touched.

I caught this incredible warmth between us and I didn't (couldn't) pull away because it felt so good.

I imagine myself wide eyed and not breathing for not wanting it to stop. Such a good, warm, wholesome, enlivening feeling.

I reckon that was my first shared sexual experience.

This is a story of the longing for acceptance and recognition at the expense of self love and respect.

As a teenager, I was, like all other teenagers I suppose, hungry for acceptance. I also longed for recognition and attention which I got from boys and through sex. Sometimes it didn't matter who the boy was really, as long as they liked me. In high school I heard the stories of others sexual encounters and, inaccurately it now seems, assumed this is what was required for acceptance and belonging.

One of my earlier boyfriends, Malcolm, was the first boy to try and feel my breasts. This was when I was fifteen. Malcolm was my second proper boyfriend. My first, at age fourteen, had only introduced me to passionate kissing with tongue, which felt OK. So Malcolm was the first to go below the mouth. After my rejection he quickly stopped contacting me and our breakup quickly ensued. I was devastated and attributed his rejection of me to my not giving sexually or somehow injuring him with my refusal.

So then I, nonverbally, encouraged all other men sexually, while simultaneously meeting Malcolm at his bus-stop after school so that I could see him and even share some of my exploits with him. I was trying to tell him I had learnt my lesson and had changed. My hunger for indiscriminate attention, and also the power I felt in sexual and gendered interactions (but not really enjoying the sexual aspect of it which felt intrusive and exploitative), extended to outings to nightclubs while underage and without my parents' knowledge. When I met someone, it felt like a successful night, when I didn't, something was missing.

At age of seventeen, I left a popular nightclub and went to the beach with a good looking guy. I had sexual intercourse for the first time with him; someone, whose name I now can't remember but whose energy field and DNA entered mine. I thought to myself, "What the hell, I might as well get it over and done with. It's going to happen sooner or later". In spite of pressure from him, I managed to not go back to his place that night. The following week I saw him again and he didn't remember who I was.

Years later when I learnt none of the school's cool crowd, whose acceptance and belonging I yearned for, were indeed having sex at all as I had once thought, I felt a deep sense of regret for what I had done.

In retrospect, my first sexual experience was one best described by the term "Frightment"; (a concept invented by my two year old son to identify a blend of exhilaration and fear). Although we often define these two feelings as distinct and different, the truth is they are often blended together in an exquisite and scary cocktail.

I remember a longing to share a depth of intimacy I could not even begin to imagine, and coupled with a teenage testosterone drive, that made me blind to any practicality. (If truth be told, there was also the socialized obligation too; the over-publicized and mass-marketed hype that has always undermined the true potential of this sacred union). Anyhow . . . it was certainly not like anything I expected. I threw myself into the experience with naive gusto And survived!

My girlfriend and I (both virgins) never really discussed how we were going to cross the boundary between heavy petting and making love but we agreed to "do it" together. And so, one night we undressed and got into bed together in anticipation and uncertainty. We were living in a communal house in suburban Cape Town, a university digs where sexual innuendoes abounded, but sex was never actually openly mentioned, let alone discussed. We had heard housemates having sex but they all pretended to be so grown up as to not need to talk about it. The desire was clear and (as far as I remember) I guessed that I knew how the mechanics of the whole thing should look. I had spent a fair amount of my puberty self pleasuring to Scope magazines and a beautifully illustrated conscious sexuality book I had found hidden in my father's study. I was nervous but able to hide that behind a bravado and nonchalance that I didn't honestly feel. I was shaking with nervous excitement.

It was a very ungainly affair; mostly punctuated with whispered apologies as I fumbled my way to a very early ejaculation immediately after (or possibly just before) penetrating my new lover. Nothing seemed to flow easily. There were limbs in wrong places; bumps and prods unintentional and a general sense of clumsiness all-round. I kept trying to get comfortable but to no avail.

I am sure now that my girlfriend did not experience it as very fulfilling at all, although she was courteous not to mention it, and I have no doubt I was an awful lover for a long time thereafter. I do not think there was much in the

way of gentle foreplay. I know there were no slow and loving caresses; very little integrity or deep worship of the Goddess that was before me.

I know now I did not understand the significance of where we had gone together and how much there was still to learn about sensitivity and intimacy. The glow afterwards, and my determination to walk proudly in the footsteps of Casanova and Don Juan De Marco, made me confident however, and I was sure I had hit on something magical. (For years afterwards I was convinced I was the best lover in the world! It is only recently I have come to realise how much I still have to learn and experience about this sacred sharing).

I wish now that I had been more present. I wish that someone had guided me into the sacred nature of sex and allowed me to understand it as a form of worship. I would have liked to have spent more time with my lover, self pleasuring and being close without needing. Yet, this said, it could only have been as it was. It was beautiful and I hope one day I am able to “do it” with true presence.

The first time that I had penetrative sex I was sixteen, it was new years and I simply decided that I wanted to lose my virginity. So I randomly chose a boy, a friend of a friend and told him that it was what I wanted to do. I did however have some conditions; I would only do it if we could do it in a bed, and if he would go to my matric (final year school) dance with me. I delved straight into trading my sexuality. I did not realise this at the time and it took many years before I was able to own this fact. So he agreed ... I mean what teenage boy would not make all the promises in the world to a girl who said she wanted to have sex and wanted to have it now.

So off we went, he found a bed and a condom. After a few minutes of kissing and our bodies were turned on, he penetrated me; I did not know how long he was inside me, a minute perhaps. Then it was over. I went into the bathroom and wiped my yoni (vagina) and saw the blood. The rush of power that flooded through my body was intoxicating. I wanted to do it again. So I went back and told him that I wanted to do it again, but he said he could not, and that we did not have any more condoms and he wanted to go back to the party.

Wow, from the feeling of being empowered to disappointed and rejected. It was a harsh tumble down into reality. So off we drove back to the party where he went to go and drink with his friends and I now realise he must have told his friends, although I have a vague memory I asked him not to.

I told no one, but for some reason I had thought that this now connected us, and I was expecting (only afterwards did I realise this) him to pay me at least some attention during the rest of the evening. This did not happen. In fact I don't even think we spoke to each other again that evening.

So, as we humans tend to do in our societies, when we are in pain we find something to numb it and avoid what we have learnt are unpleasant feelings. I went seeking alcohol to numb the pain and rejection I was feeling. I had a few drinks, a few too many drinks.

Later I found myself half naked on the bathroom floor agreeing to have sex with another boy. Desperately trying to fill that hole and numb those feelings I had felt earlier that evening from the first experience. I was so deep in my own pain, intoxicated and so desperately trying not to feel, that when he asked

if he could come, or ejaculate inside me, I thought that he asked if I was coming ... and I dived straight back into that place of wanting to please and said yes (that through the need to please I thought that if I said I was having an orgasm it would make him feel good). What he was actually asking was if he could orgasm. I had said yes, so he ejaculated inside me. And then that was that, we got up and went back to the party.

To be honest I did not really remember anything after that. But I did remember the next day being in the hazing bubble. And not having anyone to speak to about what had happened.

There was not one adult or even friend that I felt I could speak to. I simply knew that I would be shouted at, reprimanded and that an adult would entirely miss the trauma of the situation and instead choose to berate or shame me.

For the record, the first boy never did take me to the dance; in fact, I have never spoken to him since. I remember when we were all putting on the list in our classroom the name of our partner for the dance, how I felt that now he was coming with me, that somehow this was a fair trade. A harsh experience ... one I repeated many more times before I realised that my value as a person and especially as a woman was not linked to how much the person wanted to have sex with me.

The story I was going to share was of losing my virginity, but it turns out that my story is more a series of firsts and how they've influenced me. My first overtly sexual experiences were non-consensual and perpetuated by family friends during my childhood. In fact, I think it's taken most of my life just to learn what consent is and that I have the power to exercise it, although I still don't when I think the payoff will be love. I wonder how much those childhood experiences shaped me as a sexual being. It's an unanswerable question, I suppose, but I'd say I've been promiscuous for most of my life, even before the abuse started.

At six years old I was showing "Where Did I Come From?" to the other preppies as we huddled behind the big, brick barbecue. I remember Thomas and kiss Clark without any fondness, and I remember being kicked hard in the vulva from behind by Gregory, desperately choking the pain down and trying not to show how uncool I was.

I played doctors and nurses a lot, with different boys and girls. Strangely enough, the only incident I feel bad about is the one with John and the Barbie doll limbs; it hurt so very much but I didn't want to say anything for fear of not being liked.

In that healing way that compassion offers, I've forgiven the men who took advantage of me. Only hurt people hurt people. But this story is opening the dusty box at the back of the cupboard in the room with the locked door. The one in which I accidentally secreted away the happy memories with the painful ones. The ones I haven't found peace with yet.

Then I moved into my teenage years. I remember tongue-kissing Bob - which was pretty revolting - and being told by Dean to make less noise when we kissed. I'm not sure whether that's because he didn't like me growling or because his mum was home.

And then I lost my virginity.

I guess I was fourteen or fifteen. I'd told my best friend how I wanted it to be with a skillful lover and she recommended her ex-boyfriend, Darren. So he picked me up from the milk bar near high school one lunch break and drove to my home 'cause Mum was working so it was private. I don't even know if he

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used a condom. He just pulled my school dress up, pushed his way in and rutted away for a few minutes, then it was done.

I went to the toilet and discovered that I was shaking. He was unsympathetic and drove me back to school. Until now I thought I did that because I “just wanted to get rid of it” but now I realise that wasn't the case at all.

And after that came decades of giving away what should have been precious but left me feeling empty and dirty instead. Even when I was in a loving, long-term relationship with a beautiful man, I still participated in sexual activities that made me uncomfortable and I still sought validation of my self-worth from other men.

On Monday I wrote the names of all the people I've been intimate with in one way or another. I circled the names that have negative feelings associated with them and put hearts around the names that make me smile. It brings me a deep, heartfelt happiness to see that the older I get the more frequent the hearts become.

But last weekend I fell prey to the old pattern again. I so want to love and be loved, to be fully intimate with someone - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually - that I don't respect my own boundaries or needs. When will I love myself enough to honour the beautiful soul I am inside?

When will I love myself enough to honour the beautiful soul I am inside?

Dad.

That's it.

That's whose love and approval I've always sought.

That's why. The reason why I still do it.

I'm still that little girl who just wants to be loved by her silent, distant daddy.

The first thing that came to mind when asked to write about my first sexual experience was the anonymity offered. Sex is a beautiful and pleasurable intimacy shared between two beings, and yet we live in a global mind-set where sex is still considered taboo and too embarrassing to share about openly between the sexes of most ethnicities and ages. Even our movies are still cautious when it comes to sex, while at the same time gruesome violence, brutality and a host of other shameful acts is fair viewing. And so, all this to say, my anonymity here is uncomfortable, yet so ingrained by my social upbringing, my name is withheld.

And now that first sexual experience . . .

At a very young age sex seemed the thing to do. I was twelve my first time, and she was an older woman, thirteen! In my neighborhood we were mostly unsupervised at this age and that day was no different. She was young, but she had large breasts, hard to keep my eyes off – maybe I was taken off breastfeeding too soon and subconsciously longed for their nourishment.

There was an unexplained attraction between me and her, no different than attractions I have felt as an adult, where you just feel so drawn to another person that you want to climb inside them – no pun intended! We didn't openly plan our sexual encounter, but we certainly did push it, flirting, teasing, testing touches, and suggestive words. We both wanted it, yet neither would openly say it – it was out of our control.

We ended up on my bunk-bed, the top bunk, under the guise of some other activity I don't remember. It took several minutes of teasing and playing before our heads were close enough that kissing was inevitable. Suddenly, all the playfulness and innocence ended and was replaced with a kind of caring, closeness and tenderness – each wondering if we would “go all the way”. I know now we were both seeking the love we were not getting from our families.

Our passions got the best of us and any thoughts of whether or not we should continue were drowned out by blind desire. It was as if my brain had shut out everything except for this one singular moment. Our clothes started coming off, shirt, pants, and then that bra, which revealed the mystery of her breasts. It was then my erection was fully at attention, and seeing, and touching, these

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two milk white bosoms, I knew this was it, we were going to have sex, although I was not entirely clear what that entailed.

The kissing, touching and fondling was over, but then something got in my way. She was voluptuous, big hips, and a round bottom. To contain all that early womanhood she wore what was seemingly a girdle. It was tight, and hard to slide off, but when it did slide I came face to face with pubic hairs that matched her thick Irish red hair. What happened next astonishes me now – once naked, we both avoided looking at the others nakedness. I see that now as having been brought up to avert our stare from the nakedness of the opposite sex. How bizarre, and what a commentary on the social values of the time – which still exists today in some parts of cultures globally.

With her eagerness assisting me, I slid on top of her body. I could feel my erect penis resting on her vagina, but wasn't sure what came next. She seemed to know, and she reached under and helped slide my penis into her - a shiver shot through my body feeling her hand touch me. I remember feeling inexperienced compared to her, but with baby batter having filled every inch of my brain, I went along with anything. After some dry attempts, sudden moisture allowed by penis to slide in freely. Our bodies were now interlocked, our heads to each other's side, and we just laid there, me inside her, no movement.

After several moments of complete stillness, as if waiting for something to happen, I remember thinking how boring this seemed. Then I remembered how friends and others talked about pumping up and down.

No way! I said to myself inside, *That's perverted, I'm not doing that.* I don't know where I got that, but somehow I was led to believe that moving in and out of her would have been perverted, but laying there, inside her, was okay.

After a while of inactivity, I think we both just assumed it must be over. I slid out of her, my erection already softening. In the same way we got undressed, without looking at each other's bodies, we got dressed and then went outside as if nothing had happened. We did not feel like we were boyfriend and girlfriend, it was something different, but we didn't openly discuss it – in fact we had to keep it a secret because she would have been labeled a slut, and I would have been the envy of everyone – how strange.

I think we both walked away from that first sexual encounter as if we had not yet fully experienced sex and it was only a few days later that we repeated our sexcapade. But this time, I decided to move up and down, and in and out of her – she moaned and I groaned – I never looked back!

I was on holiday with my best friend, her mum and step dad, staying on an island off Queensland. Loaded up with teen magazines to read while sunbathing on the beach, I remember finding an article written with big sisterly advice, encouraging girls to not be in such a hurry to lose their virginity. That the first time would probably take all of fifteen minutes, that it would be more pleasurable for the guy, and it certainly wasn't going to be like in the movies with fireworks going off in the background. Well, for a fourteen year old who had been menstruating since the age of ten, with a libido going crazy, and who was wildly curious to know what the act of sex was actually like - it made me even more determined to find out for myself!

We had been hanging out with some guys who came to the island in the holidays to do life saving. On New Year's Eve one of them told me there was a big party happening at the main beach and there would be fireworks. I knew what the answer would be if I asked my friends mum if we could go, so after dinner I feigned illness, said I was going to bed, snuck out on my own and hopped onto a bus with a group of seventeen year old boys.

Someone had bought me a six pack of beer. I don't know how much I drank but I got very drunk very fast. Each time I opened a bottle I would slice my hand on the metal twist top in the same place and wouldn't realise until someone would tell me I was dripping blood. I had to keep going to the bar to get band aids and I remember the bar lady saying, "Oh, not you again love". I still have that scar on my left hand on the small mound of Venus under my ring finger.

Not remembering how so - I managed to find myself on the beach making out with one of the guys. He asked me if I wanted to have sex with him and I said yes. Here was the moment that was going to quell my curiosity and I would find out once and for all what it was all about, except that I was so drunk I could not feel a thing! I knew he was inside me but it didn't feel good or bad, it didn't feel like anything. I looked up into the night sky, lying on my back with some dude on top of me, and it must have been midnight because there were fireworks going off! Well you got that wrong article! Cruel irony.

Another guy from the group happened upon us, saw what we were doing and decided to join in by sticking his dick in my mouth - not a particularly pleasant experience - and then when the first guy had finished, proceeded to fuck me.

Perhaps he was trying to wake me up or bring some life into my body or something, but his style of banging was to pick me up by the shoulders and keep slamming my back into the ground. I felt that - he kept knocking the wind out of me - but that's all I felt.

Afterwards, they had both disappeared and I was wandering the beach alone, disoriented, wondering where everyone was, when the rest of the group found me. I guess there had been reports back that I was wasted or easy or up for it.

"Come on," they called to me. "We're just going for a walk down the end of the beach."

"Okay." And off I unwittingly went with four or five boys to the other end of the beach.

Of all the boys in the group there was one particularly good looking guy who I had hoped would be the one that I had lost my virginity to, and now at the other end of the beach, he was kissing me. In my naivety I was thinking, 'Oh, he is interested in me' and having some kind of delusion of the romantic kind, when really he was just there to get me on the ground so that he and his mates could all have sex with me.

I don't remember much of what happened really, as boys waited for their turn to fuck a numb drunk girl then head back to the party when they were finished with me. I think I've either blacked out the memory or blacked out for most of the time it was happening. I do remember the last guy to have sex with me must have had a longer penis or was thrusting deep and hitting my cervix and it hurt and I told him to stop and pushed him off me. That was the only sensation I felt of having someone enter me the whole night.

Back in my room with my friend, I proudly proclaimed that I had fucked them all, but later the next day sitting on the beach when a few of them walked past and referred to me as the slut, she gently suggested that I had been used. Months down the track I told her I had been raped because I couldn't stand her thinking of me as a slut, but I've always wondered about this word and whether it was an honest thing to say when I just allowed myself to lie there and take it.

She was mad with me that next day. I had been wearing a new white top of hers out to dinner, and never thought to take it off before I snuck out. It returned with me, frayed, covered in blood and with stains on the back where I had been slammed into the ground, stains that never washed out.

012

Here is what I remember about my first experience of sexual intercourse.

It was with someone that I truly loved, and still do to this day (sixteen years later). I am grateful for that.

My boyfriend at the time was older than me, however a very gentle and understanding man. Although he wanted me, he was patient and we talked about it for some months before it actually happened.

I don't remember what it physically felt like, that first time, although when I try to remember it I have this sense that things went smoothly. I had masturbated for such a long time beforehand that I think my body was pretty ready for it. Emotionally, I wanted the sex to happen and I felt safe with my partner. We went on to have plenty more sex and it was fun and exciting to explore this part of my life with someone who cared deeply about me. I think the best part of this was that it helped me to be free with all future partners. Maybe it was slightly easier because I was a naturally sexual being, but I definitely feel that my positive first experience helped a lot.

An interesting thing to note as well, is that even though my values have changed as I've gotten older, and I certainly no longer believe that young people's first experience of sex *should* or *must* be with someone they love (this is what I thought when I was a teenager/young adult), I'm still really grateful that this was my experience, and I value it highly.

I remember many first times, which has me reflecting on what actually makes THE first time for many, or any of us, when we consider our sexual journeys. With the perspective of hindsight from many years gone by since my first firsts happened, I know now that each of us follows a unique path just as surely as I know each of us shares so many similarities in the tender core of our hearts; mostly a desire to understand, love and be in true connection with our own selves and others.

The first 'First' that comes to mind is when I began to explore the body of another girl, a childhood friend. I see us sitting in her bedroom, our seven- or eight-year old legs spread out into easy straddles, curiously investigating each other's bodies. There is a quality of innocence to these memories. It was such a natural impulse to learn about and connect with these fleshy little vessels called bodies that we live inside of. It must have felt good because we certainly enjoyed ourselves, yet I can't recall feeling something I'd actually call arousal at that stage. Comfort and satisfaction seem like better words.

She was not to be my last same-sex encounter. There would be more, and as I grew into more overt sexuality when puberty came on, desiring deeper exploration and sensation, I had two girlfriends in particular with whom I would spend hours in the throes of young, playful passion. During these pre- and early-teen years there was a sense of the forbidden that overshadowed our delight. We knew that if we were caught we'd likely face judgment and punishment, so we simply didn't get caught. There was no suspicion to be raised from spending time with girl friends, so we had ample space to be in our pleasure and we took great liberties with it! Kissing, touching, licking, cuddling, thrusting and any other instinct that arose found itself welcome in the spaces we shared. I feel huge gratitude for those experiences. I never questioned my heterosexual orientation or felt wrong, even with the knowledge that others might have very strong opinions about what I was up to. It felt natural, juicy and fun, so I followed that impulse as a teenager is often want to do.

As to when engaging with the opposite sex came into the picture, admittedly things did get more complex. I remember the first boy I made out with. He was a few years older than me. We lived in the same neighborhood and often hung out as a group with some others, including my sensuous muse and fellow same-sex explorer.

One night he and I were by ourselves, standing in a grassy swath behind our homes, shaded by tall hedges and we shared my first kiss. Though I'd kissed girls by then, it's interesting for me to notice that this still feels like my first kiss. It registers that way in my body when I bring this memory back to life; the anticipation, the thrill, the awkwardness. All of that still vibrates in my cells decades later and feels just as delicious. And I remember immediately wondering 'What's next?' Does this make him my boyfriend? Do I need to do more?

A conditioned storyline began to overlay my embodied experience as it never had when exploring with girls, and thus the complexities began for me.

I will fast forward to the first that many will, I imagine, naturally equate as my first: the loss of my virginity through penetrative, heterosexual sex.

He was two years my senior, at a far more elevated social status than I was in the popularity hierarchy of our high school, something of a "bad boy" to my "good girl" and somehow we clicked in a way I'd never known before. We played extensively, though on limited occasions, before intercourse came into the picture. I realised how much I loved oral sex then, both receiving and giving, and felt really turned on by my enjoyment.

There was always an element of edginess to our encounters. We weren't a couple. We were more like playmates. And at sixteen, on a weekday afternoon when no one else was home, he came to my house and we began to fool around and decided to take a shower together. In that shower, I offered up my virginity. I don't remember anything about how it felt during. There's no recollection of sensation, which is curious to me, though not surprising. It lacked romance, which I shared with my long term high school sweetheart who I met a couple months after losing my virginity.

What I do recall is feeling quite excited after the act, and telling my mom about what happened, which gratefully, I had full permission to do. My parents imbued in me a sense of acceptance around my sexuality and did not shun or shame me for exploring as I saw fit. They trusted me and taught me to trust myself and act responsibly. I pray that those reading these words will learn to do the same.

And I will offer a final first of mine. Eighteen years after I lost my virginity, I experienced what it is to make love as a holy and sacred act. Inside those eighteen years I had had many different partners, a six year marriage, a wide exploration of my own sexuality and a lot of learning and healing in the process. I saw where I'd shut down around sex, where I'd engaged in unhealthy power plays through it, where I'd allowed myself to be defined and ruled by my sex, for better or for worse.

A desire to bring union to my spiritual life and my sex life arose very strongly in me. That desire led me to the path of Tantra, and to lovers who, like me, treat sex as worship. Being in union as the Divine Feminine with the Sacred Masculine has been the most profoundly ecstatic and beautiful experience of my life. It took me quite a while to get there, yet that is a First I would still wait lifetimes for. My whole outlook on life has changed, and my path has been redirected, all for the better.

Our sex is precious and sacred. It is the most creative, empowering act there is. We are gods and goddesses in bodies, and when we learn to appreciate and approach ourselves, our lovers and the act of sex accordingly, there is simply no experience that compares.

I wish you many marvelous Firsts.

Stay in the mystery of your own self, and learn to honour and trust your body and heart.

014

I was raised in a household that subscribed to the "no sex before marriage" idea perpetrated by the church.

So I waited, and probably got married (the first time anyway) to hurry that along a bit. It's not like there hadn't been any sexual play before that night, but no actual penis in vagina sex took place until then. I was barely twenty-years old.

And the sad thing is. I can't remember it. Not a thing. How long it lasted. Was there foreplay? Did I like it? Not a thing.

What I do remember is that sex became a bargaining tool in that marriage; my bargaining tool. You can have it these nights a week, only in exchange for this or that, and so on.

And I never enjoyed it. It was a chore and given with resentment in a marriage that only lasted a few years.

I was eighteen. I was at an international school in Wales (think Hogwarts for real, a castle on the Channel, kids from eighty different countries, freedom, co-Ed; a huge departure from my private, South African, all girls school.) I had only kissed a few boys by this point. I only got my period at age seventeen and had resisted my sexuality with all my might after seeing/hearing the sexual abuse between my father and mother caused by my father's drinking. But sexual energy won through and I fell for a Spanish boy. He had a long black pony tail, was extremely intelligent and deep and had an activist energy. He was also in love with my Norwegian co year, a stunning woman in my eyes, and I always compared myself to her physically and found myself wanting. Boy was it painful to watch them snuggling on the window seats on my way to the dining hall.

Then I went to Norway on my project week and he was also on our tour! One night we played spin the bottle and he said he wanted to kiss me. I assumed he must have broken up with the Norwegian goddess to even say such a thing. So we kissed and my whole body tingled and responded so powerfully. I wanted him and my heart believed it was in love. Back at college I had to face the painful truth that he went back to the Norwegian. I grieved and mourned and obsessed about him for months.

Then just after my eighteenth birthday he decided to get together with me. I felt so chosen and special and decided this was the person I would first have sex with. He spent a lot of time teaching me the art of foreplay, he took me to heaven with his fingers and tongue and one morning we were laying in his bed in his dorm and decided to "do it". It was awkward, especially since he prepared me for the fact that sex would "kill" our hip bones. Yes it does kill your hip bones if as a woman you don't bend your knees!

While he was making his way inside me his dorm mate walked in and we all had a chat. It was over quite quickly after that. Neither of us had orgasms. I noticed that I bled a little that day. I remember having a shower and feeling like "a woman" and quite smug. But I didn't talk to anyone about it. I just carried on. He and I had an on and off relationship for the next six months. We improved our sexual compatibility but his emotional ability remained nonexistent and just as the Norwegian was tossed aside, so was I, without any communication. I was so hurt it took me another three years before I had another boyfriend!

016

I remember we had snuck out down the bank in the dark after supper before we had to be inside for roll call at boarding school.

We had been boyfriend and girlfriend for a long time, or what felt like a long time as we were both only ten. We were friends. We had been inseparable for months and months, boyfriend and girlfriend and totally in love and loving of each other. One thing I recall strongly is that we played and played and had such fun together.

I remember putting my hand on his cheek, his back to a tree. We were giggly and nervous, partially because of the fact that we were where we were not supposed to be and because of the thrill of experiencing something for the first time.

We had planned the whole thing together. Tonight was the night. We leaned in and we kissed and then opened our mouths and I felt his tongue, it was the first time that I had ever had another person's tongue in my mouth. I remember thinking how warm his tongue was and how soft. And it felt very strange. We then pulled away, giggled, held each other's hands and ran to the boarding house for roll call.

It was fun, innocent and a curious discovery of each other.

017

When I was eight I had a family friend's son ask me to go up to his room. His little sister was around playing and she went out the room. I don't remember how it happened, but all I remember was him telling me to lie down and I'm lying down on this bed with him lying on top of me pushing himself onto me, basically dry humping if you want a very visual image.

He said, "If you want to have a boyfriend, you gotta be good at this." I could feel him pushing himself into me, even though I was wearing clothes, so it wasn't actual sex.

That statement that he made, "If you want a boyfriend you gotta be good at this," . . . I've had so much feeling work done around that and my belief that that's all I am worthy of and that's all men want me for and those sorts of things.

That belief had a very significant impact.

It was the first sexual experience I remember.

Sometime after that I remember I had a little play date when I was nine or thereabouts with a boy from the rugby club. When he came over I told him to lie on top of me and do what the other guy had done. He had no idea because he was only eight and said, "What?!"

But he did it anyway and as he was on top of me he dribbled spit into my mouth, maybe he was nervous or he wanted to kiss me, I don't know. Although I'm not sure he meant to kiss me or if he was just dribbling. I yelled for him to get off me!

The other guy hadn't kissed me; he'd had braces and acne and hadn't kissed me. It was quite a thing for me for a very long time, having 'sex' was one thing but kissing someone was to me much more intimate. This was my first sexual experience without it being proper penetrative sex.

It was a significant event that shaped my sense of myself, my sexuality, and how easy it was for me to sleep with someone but kissing them was harder for me to do than it was to sleep with them.

I was fifteen years old. My father had died of cancer when I was nine. I had missed him a lot. I felt like I had been abandoned by him. In my young mind, if he had really loved me, he would have stayed. So I deduced, wrongly of course, that I wasn't lovable enough for him to have wanted to live. Whatever the case, I was feeling unloved, unlovable and was yearning for a father figure in my life, someone who wanted me and would love me unconditionally.

I was a horse rider, I loved it very much. It was an unusual "scene" of people, where everyone from fourteen to forty hung out together. We traveled around the country competing and drinking way too much from a very young age. I also had a crush on one of the riding instructors. He was thirty years old. My mother trusted him to lift me around and do things with me; it helped her out as she was now a single mother.

She did once say to me, "He's too old for you" and I had said, "I know", but I didn't.

I felt sophisticated and older than my years. I thought I had everything figured out. I was mature. My father's death had grown me up somewhat, robbed me of my childhood in a way, because I was in such grief and life had become real, the fairytale bubble of childhood was over a long time ago.

I also had my riding instructor wrapped around my little finger. He would do whatever I told him and I loved that. One day when he was lifting me home from horse riding there was a flower seller at the traffic lights. I made him buy me flowers then insisted he drive me down to the river, where we horse rode sometimes, to give the flowers some water. I wanted to see how far I could push him, how far he was prepared to go for me. I loved the spontaneity that being with an older man brought.

It was two weeks before my sixteenth birthday when I lost my virginity. He came to fetch me from my house and took me to a bar. I had lied to my mother about where we were going. I looked incredible, tanned skin, great figure and the tiniest little white stretch dress that I had to practically pour myself into. We started to drink.

We intrigued a couple at the bar and they started asking us questions, "How old are the two of you?"

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“Guess” I said.

It was a game, it was fun.

I loved shocking people.

When we were drunk, we went back to his hotel room. He lived there, it felt very posh, and we kissed in the lift on the way up to his room. I snooped around in his things. I didn't have the polite filters of an adult. I did what I wanted and I felt in control. I remember being a little freaked out by the way he kept his clothes. Everything was just too neat and orderly. His shirts came back from the hotel laundry wrapped in plastic and he would keep them in their packaging all neatly stacked in colour coded order. He wore a kind of uniform of Lacoste T-shirts, light denim and sneakers.

He was also clearly obsessed with cleanliness. When I look back now, I understand what the attraction probably was; I was clean, untouched, a virgin. He was a little surprised by this though, and questioned me more to make sure I was telling the truth. I think I felt him feeling bad about this, but I was so sure this was what I wanted. I knew “it” was going to happen.

It's all quite unclear from here, so many years later, and although I know for sure that I had sex with him that night and then three more times after that, I could not tell you anything more of the experience. I don't remember a thing! These memories are clearly suppressed in me somewhere and I do not know why? I don't think he was violent, it was definitely consensual (as much as it could be, considering the dynamic), however I cannot access any details what so ever about the actual sexual act. The last thing I remember before it happened, I was standing on the balcony, looking back at him in the bedroom, looking at him looking at me and feeling like I was all grown up.

I wasn't!

This was not a normal situation. It took me a long time to realise that. To realise there was something wrong with this guy for wanting to sleep with a girl half his age. I quickly figured out what was wrong with me though, and I've spoken about that above, about how I was looking for someone to replace my father, someone to hold me and love me and be with me. The boys my age

just didn't seem to be able to fill that void. I literally wanted an older man. I wanted to be made to feel the way my father made me feel.

As for him, he went on to screw a few more young girls at my riding school, I was abandoned once again. I stopped horse riding soon after this all went down and left that scene behind me. I pretended I was fine, that nothing fazed me, but it was all hurting me terribly deeply and I would spend a large part of my adult life healing myself from the trauma of this experience.

I do wonder why I have no memories of the actual act. This concerns me a little; that there are memories hidden in me that still need revealing. I wonder why my subconscious has suppressed them, what actually took place that night and the few times after that when we had sex.

I know this was not an ideal "first sexual experience" and that if I could do it over, I would have chosen a very different scenario; perhaps someone my own age, who was mad about me, who I could be myself with, that would have been really good. But circumstances gave me this experience and I forgave myself. My intentions were pure, I just wanted love, I missed my dad, and we do strange things for even stranger reasons we may have no idea about at the time. I forgive him too; he clearly had issues of his own that made him want to do the things he did. I think he probably loved me in some strange way for some point in time. I don't hold any of this against him. I forgive him too.

I have had a lot of sexual issues to work through, from this experience and others that followed, and they have molded me into who I am and helped me to heal my sexuality on the whole. Our wounding can be our biggest teacher, the thing that makes us wake up and move towards wholeness. Today I have a healthy, happy and fulfilling sex life with a beautiful man I've been with for twenty years. This tale has a happy ending.

Thank you for listening to my story, it's been good to share it, I hope it offers you something in the process.

019

My mind's first sexual experience would have been the first sexual experience that I shared with another person.

My first sexual experience I shared with myself. I was about twelve and, as far as I can recall, I was not influenced by anything or anyone to start masturbating. It was a natural experience. I got an erection and began to touch myself, and it felt good, so I continued, then it felt very good and it ended in an orgasm. It was simply a response to what was happening in my body and continuing with touch that felt very good. At this point I did not know that this was even called masturbation.

As a young boy I was at a friend's house and it was there where it was a conscious choice to go and masturbate, each separately, but this time it was influenced by another boy's suggestion. I remember I felt like it was something we had to keep secret. I had already inherited society's shaming of masturbation and sexuality.

I did not grow up in a religious household but I did grow up in a house where both parents were research scientists, so science was the law. Feelings were not dishonoured but they were not spoken about often as the need for them was seen as unnecessary. I did not have space to talk about how I felt about any feelings that were coming up during this time.

When I was about fourteen or fifteen I was with my Godmother's children. That was when I got exposed to my sexuality with someone else. Where we touched each other, and masturbated each other to the point of orgasm. It was not a comfortable thing for me, but I was trying to fit in, so I did it.

020

I was fifteen. I was dating a boy two years older than me. He was tall and extremely funny.

I don't remember how long we had been dating for, probably a few months. We were comfortable, relaxed; and I guess we got to that point where - even though no words are overtly spoken - I just knew sex was the next step. We had had a few close encounters on my lounge carpet after school (he would often come hang out at my house) and I knew we were soon headed to the other side of innocence.

The great deed happened on my bed, after school one day. I don't recall the words we exchanged. I am sure he was high on the thrills of the experience although he was very gentle and quiet. We were in the missionary position. I was on my back, with my white ceiling and the dark brown wood of my cupboard doors as a view. And he was on top of me. And even though we were technically in the most intimate of moments, there was no eye contact, and I was deep in my own head and thoughts.

Stunned.

Curious.

In shock.

Slightly confused.

It was painful. Yes I remember now, my first time was painful. We didn't pretend it was the most romantic moment ever. And I don't really recall what happened afterwards. We may have cuddled but I can't be sure. And then he went home. We continued dating and having sex until our relationship reached its natural end a few months later.

If I had to give this story a title, it would be called THE NON-EVENT.

021

I was at Nationals, fifteen years old and never been kissed. A friend of my older brother's, from a different country, sent me a letter which he got a friend of his to give to me before my National Championship Race. He said, "I'm not sure what your brother or your parents will think but I would like to see you at the after party tonight. I hope that you're coming. Good luck for your race."

Anyway, I went to the party. We were both being really coy and not talking to each other. One of his mates asked why I was ignoring him and I said that I wasn't ignoring him, he hadn't spoken to me!

So he comes up to me and asks, "Can I kiss you?" and I say, "Yes, but I haven't kissed anyone before."

So he took me upstairs to a bedroom, which probably wasn't appropriate at one of my brother's friend's houses. He kissed me in front of a window but they were all outside and started throwing beer bottles up at the window. I remember pulling away and him being left with his tongue hanging out. It was just awful. It was the most hashed up, worst kiss ever.

But it got better

He came to our place and we spent the night together. We just kissed. We didn't have sex or do anything like hands up tops or down pants. It was very *very* tame. We kept in touch for two years, sending gifts to each other. He sent me necklaces and letters. It was just beautiful.

Then my mum sent me out to his country to stay with his family. I had a room in the house and he had a room in the back of the house. It could have been an extension or something, but I remember I had to go outside to get there. Thinking about it now I don't remember the first moment we slept together, but I do remember sleeping together for the whole week I was there. I don't remember the actual moment of having sex. I more remember the euphoric feeling. It feels like I was so revered, so honoured and acknowledged. It was the most beautiful thing.

I am still friends with him to this day. He was the first person I kissed at fifteen and then I didn't kiss anyone else for the next two years because I was so in

love with him, so infatuated with him. It was a very positive, beautiful experience.

The first time I had sex came after several failed attempts with my first girlfriend. Looking back at these “failed attempts” they were nothing more than anxiety and the pressure I had put on myself to perform. Every time we were together I would get an erection, but just as I would go to put the condom on I would start to lose it and I would really beat myself up, thinking there must be something very wrong with me. I thought this so much I even went to see a doctor but he could not find anything physically wrong with me. He even prescribed Viagra to help, which I tried once, but I felt so much shame around this that I never took it again.

I can't tell you how much this whole issue played on my mind, especially when we were alone together and there was a possibility of having sex. I remember feeling very ashamed and really hating myself for not being able to maintain an erection to have sex.

Then after a couple of months, one evening when we were in a hotel together, my girlfriend at the time suggested we have sex without the condom as she was taking birth control pills so it would be ok if I ejaculated inside her. I remember being hesitant, but at the same time just really wanting to have sex with my girlfriend. We did end up having sex that night and everything went fine. There was no longer that pressure in my mind to quickly get the condom on before I lost my erection. Just to be inside her felt incredibly good and looking back now I would even say sacred.

However, being that it was my first time and I was in my early twenties, I remember that it was over quite quickly. I didn't give myself time to enjoy the experience; the pressure was still there in my mind to get it over with, to get rid of my virginity as if it were a shameful thing. I remember being tense in my body, not even feeling myself and allowing myself to relax, but being very much in my head.

Looking back, I can see how much unnecessary pressure and expectation I had put on myself; to be perfect the first time, to please my girlfriend sexually, or to be something like the men I had seen in pornographic videos.

Incidentally, after this I no longer had any trouble putting on and using a condom – the whole thing was in my head. My mind had created so much

pressure to perform that it completely got in the way of meeting my girlfriend naturally, and relaxing into the experience openly and innocently.

I am so grateful I had such a loving girlfriend, and that I had these experiences to show me what happens when I live from my mind and the minds of others (friends, media, pornography), and not my own heart.

My dad was an extremely strict disciplinarian and, for a time in my young life, a minister in the Presbyterian Church.

We were brought up the biblical way, with the rod and “no sex before marriage”. Sex was a subject not spoken about but given the labels dirty, naughty and secret. He was of the opinion that all guys would want it and they would try and take it and it was for me to guard and protect until my marriage night. Then of course I was told that I would enjoy it immensely and remember never to say no. I would be happy that I had “kept” myself for my husband who of course would expect me to be “a harlot in the bedroom” and greet him at the door with a sexy outfit and his slippers and beer. I knew it to be true because I had heard the amazingness of it from my parents’ bedroom all the time. As a result I valued my virginity and was most “fearful” of it being “taken”.

Of course I never touched my vagina At a very young age I was told that if I touched “that”, “down there”, I would be in big *big BIG* trouble and I would get a very big hiding. Silly that I never wondered how he would know.

When I started my period (in grade eleven - yeah that says it all) I wasn’t allowed to use the new tampons that all the girls were using for fear of “breaking your virginity”. I did, eventually, with fear and trepidation in the bathrooms at school. I walked around knowing for sure that everyone could tell from the shame on my face that I had something “up there”.

I met a very sexy man after school and after he had won me over from a sweet and gentle gorgeous poet (how stupid was I?), I proceeded to protect my honour valiantly at every date. I held out for quite a while and was very proud that I had done a stellar job of “keeping it together” even after a holiday away.

I decided that on my nineteenth birthday I would “give myself” to the man I loved. We were staying at the farm, in my parents’ house. He slept inside and I had a room on the outside veranda. He had already had a lot to drink and we went for a walk in the dark, he smoked some pot and had some more whiskey. We got back to my room and lay on the bed. I felt like it was an amazing moment and after the usual kissing and cuddling I led him into me. It was a huge moment for me. I had made a conscious decision about it. I was totally in control and sober(ish).

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Like a bride I felt revered and special. It wasn't that great, and didn't last that long but I had done it. He seemed to be having a great time. I had crossed the Rubicon. All stress fell away and I woke up feeling amazing, tall and beautiful. I felt an immense sense of power.

He came from the house and I smiled at him in a secret sort of way and he took me to work in the center of town. We got there early and went for a coffee. As we sat I looked at him and was so keen to hear what he was holding back from telling me in the car. After all of his trying to have sex with me before I would have thought that he would be thrilled.

As we got our coffee, he looked at me and took my hand.

'This is it!' I thought.

He looked at me and said, "You know last night when we were on the bed?" Yes? I smiled lovingly. "Did you notice that your dad was peeping at us? He was standing at the door."

It took a moment to understand what he was saying. I then told him that we had "made love" for the first time, that we had "done it".

"What?" He was open mouthed and stunned.

"Really? Omw!" He was stoned and drunk and didn't remember that part.

Crazy hey?

Anyway he installed a radio and tape into my beetle as a gift and I got a huge bunch of flowers.

A little later he left me for another friend and I married another man on the rebound. I left that husband, who turned out to be a sociopath of note, after twenty-six years. I lived with a lot of fear until my children were out of the house and I could escape.

Sweet sixteen and never been kissed? Well almost, and at least in the “official” story book of my life. I had my first serious boyfriend, with everything that comes with that for a kid growing up in the eighties in a conservative household, at around sixteen.

But before that ...

My first consensual sexual experiences happened with a cousin. Looking back now, and only very recently actually, I saw that it was a gift although for many years I held so much shame and secrecy around it.

I grew up very shy, as in VERY shy; a quiet good girl, with no interest, except for a keen avoidance of the boy species. We lived inland but had cousins down at the coast who we’d visit most December holidays. They were so radically cool compared to me. Tanned. Surfers. Rebels. Everything I was not and it was always so amazing to be able to be part of “the in crowd” when we visited.

From a fairly young age I had noticed (it was subtle and I noticed this in hindsight when unpacking this story) my guy cousin’s, let’s call it, fascination with me. He’s about four years older than me and totally gorgeous in my book. I was NOT switched on to the nuances of sexuality or overtures of attraction at all. But it was there. Still, everything remained as a subtle thread, an electric current, until he was out of school and I was about fifteen.

He joined the armed forces and regularly came to stay at our family home on some of his passes. Why? I thought he got on better with my parents than his own and that at this stage we lived closer to his training base than his own family. Naïve? Maybe? Definitely. But who is to say what was going on in his life. We didn’t talk much. There was a different attraction at play.

I so clearly remember that first kiss. The weeks and months that followed not so much. Yet they had impact. Impact I only realised recently and have consciously worked with to unlock the shame held in my response to him.

That first kiss . . .

It was summer, a long weekend. I’d been swimming in the back garden when he arrived. Warm friendly greetings from everyone and I went upstairs to

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change. I have no idea how he came to be standing at the entrance to my room. But I remember what came next. I was standing with my back to the wall and he was close to me. Very close. No words. Just a long look, and hardly any breathing on my part, and he leaned in for a kiss. I didn't pull away, went with it. Trusting. Curious. Lost in the sensations that exploded in my body. As lips met softly. Stop. Look. Again. Mouths open this time. Tongues probing. Explore. Melt.

He left the room. I didn't. I stood stunned and in silence for a while. What just happened? Oh. Ooooooh. Down the stairs I ran with this moment held secretly inside me. What a potent mix; delicious delight and secret shame. Shame because of the whole family thing right? You aren't supposed to do that with a cousin. Not that sort of kiss. And feel this way!

And that's all I remember from that visit.

What followed though was a gradual unfolding of exploration and coming together when he came to visit. And this is where my memory gets kind of gray and patchy. Like snap shots of an old black and white movie with white blotches of lost film in-between.

Sometimes he came to my room, late at night when the whole house slept, or I went to his room in the guest flat outside. We spent hours exploring each other's bodies. Touching, kissing, feeling, moving. I followed the longings and yearnings in my body and he just seemed to be the 'other body' in that exploration. No romantic notions, no missing him when he wasn't around. It felt like some sort of secret agreement between the two of us. When he wasn't around, it wasn't, and when he was around, this natural (yes, I'm calling it natural now) physical, sexual exploration. And I have no memory of every talking about what was happening. Also, I never felt pressurised to do anything that crossed a boundary for me. We never had penetrative sex. That was a boundary for me. But we played with a lot of sensual and sexual discovery.

I have a very supportive partner now. We have no secrets about our past connections or good and bad experiences. And we talk a lot. It happens sometimes that a memory surfaces whilst making love. And some time last year, this first sexual meeting with my cousin came flooding back. It's interesting, because what struck me were all the places I had held my emerging sexuality back, constrained in my meeting with him because of society, family or other ideas about what is good or bad, allowed or not

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allowed. And in a very tender love-making with my new partner, I allowed the places that had got stuck in my teenage body to be felt, to actually follow through with the longings that had been there at fifteen; the longings that had not been expressed. And something came free in me. Unlocked from the shame I had felt for this first experience into a seeing of its gift and a fulfillment of its longing, here now almost three decades later.

So while there's a relief in me now for having let go of the shame, for the acceptance of my teenage self and her explorations, for the cousin and how he simply was there to meet me and draw this out of me; there is also sadness. And I don't really know why. Sadness because it took almost three decades to see, feel and unlock the full potential of that meeting? Sadness because it had to be kept hidden for so long? Sadness because I never got to say 'thank you' to him or talk about it with him? I don't really know.

What I do know is that I want it to be different for my own children. I wish for them that they can accept themselves and their bodies and awakening sexuality with much more ease and openness than I did. That they will be able to talk about their experiences with me, or someone they trust, and I will be able to celebrate with them as they explore and discover every angle of what feels good for them and what not.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story in this book. May it spark conversations and open safe places to speak about what is beautiful and natural and should not be locked away in shame or disgrace.

When asked to contribute to this courageous and important work, my initial feelings were jumbled and contradictory. How do I contribute? Is humour the way in? What is my truth around my sexuality, and so on . . . and in the passing of time and delaying the actual sitting to craft this piece, it dawned on me - there is no separation, no difference, between me, my heart and my sexuality; it is all energy, moving, changing, transforming, creating and with the potential to destroy, to alienate and forever impact one's self worth.

So I am not going to write about the evenings spent escaping adult eyes to experiment with my first tentative adolescent touch.

Nor will I write about my first wet and sloppy kiss, hiding in a cupboard, wondering what all the fuss was about!

Instead I will write about my first love, my best friend and the one who first broke my hymen and then subsequently my heart. The meetings of body, heart, mind and soul from which I am not sure I ever subconsciously recovered, the one that I allowed to define me and my self worth for so very long.

This first sexual experience, this blind hope and subsequent absolute devastation, surely led me onto a myriad of such self loathing that here I sit, still wondering about him, but mostly about that young woman giving herself away so freely and hopefully . . . like millions of others before and since.

So this is my story . . .

He was tall, dark and handsome. He was my best friend and we had just admitted we were in love with each other. I was in my final year of school and he was now in the Navy and sporting that gorgeous white uniform. I was done for.

We planned for me to visit over Easter, my first trip to Cape Town that wasn't in the summer and was without parental supervision - just me, my bestie and a whole lot of hope and love.

Well, suffice to say the only part that played ball was my bestie. Even the weather was foul and the hacken-cracks howled, but we were young, carefree and I was completely, absolutely and totally in love.

The sex itself was painful, awkward and quick; underwhelming to say the least, but I was so very happy that my first time was with my true love that for a while, this was enough.

But I wasn't to know of his treacherous heart. I wasn't yet aware of what those words even meant, he was my best friend, and he would never intentionally hurt me, surely? Until, that is, I found out just how wrong a young girl can be when choosing someone special for one of the most profound and important energy exchanges of her life.

He was a liar and a cheat.

He would drop me at school when he visited and then use my car to visit 'Her'. She was older and no doubt more experienced at the giving and receiving of pleasure. When my besties revealed this to me I would not, could not, believe them - not him, not my best friend, never! But he laughed when I confronted him, told me it was boring with me, that we were young - he didn't say sorry, he didn't feel anything . . . or if he did, he never let me know it.

I was devastated, lost, betrayed, abandoned, and confused. Inconsolable. I think shattered is probably the best adjective I could use here; absolutely and totally shattered into a million little irreconcilable pieces.

You see, all I heard was . . .

I am boring,
I am not interesting,
I am not pretty enough,
I am not sexy enough,
I am not important,
My feelings don't count,
I am stupid,
Somehow no longer worthy,
He doesn't care.
Did he ever care?
Could anyone care for me now?

No one will ever care because I am not worthy of respect, of anything really.

And so I carried this, all over the world and back. I carried it subconsciously into one ten year marriage and one five year relationship where nothing they could ever do would be enough. Because it had been confirmed, this nagging suspicion I imagine we all have growing up, had now been confirmed - I was so very obviously, not enough.

I stuffed that hurt so far down that for a while I felt nothing but excitement for my future, for more, for better, everything was absolutely perfect. I had my whole life ahead of me. But never, not once, did I ever address the hurt teenager who was used and discarded; not once did I honour her pain and embrace her suffering, allowing the energy to transform, to heal and so to pass. Instead that teenager defined my relationships, defined my choices and confirmed, every time without fail, just how unworthy I was.

This is as clear as day now, as an adult looking back twenty five years later.

First he rejected me, and then I used this excuse to keep rejecting myself over and over again.

Because you see, it just simply is not true.

We are born worthy, whole and complete.

We are born wrapped in wonder and excitement, hopeful and filled with love and joy and then our lack of faith, our lack of practice at believing in our wholeness and our perfection allows life to slowly kick the faith and joy out of us, one bad relationship, one sexual misstep, one lapse in judgment, one youthful innocent misjudgment at a time until we no longer believe in our wholeness. We become judge and juror, jury and executioner and we decide, unconsciously, that we are no longer worthy. We allow another, on his or her journey back to wholeness, to dismantle what little self worth we have in the blink of an eye. We begin to view ourselves as separate and let this belief define the mirror through which we choose to view ourselves. And boy do we carry this forward with conviction, consciously or not, until the source deep within us persists and insists we begin to face ourselves, humbly and with an openness borne of the misery we repeatedly find ourselves in. We find ourselves with no choice, if we are to ever be happy.

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Are we ready to become our own best friend?

Ready to forgive ourselves for the self inflicted abuse, the lies we told ourselves so we didn't have to feel the pain of rejection that had absolutely nothing to do with us in the first place!

And so, slowly, we are compelled to meet ourselves again, we embrace the wounded child and teenager ruling within, allowing her to become whole again, committing to her that never again will we let another's behaviour dictate our path for us. We finally let the healing begin, the remembering commence, and the choices we once made become just that, choices, not good nor bad, just choices that allowed us to meet ourselves, naked, raw and ready to begin again, differently, gently, and with our own well-being a top priority.

And above all, we commit to ourselves that we will allow our feelings to matter, our instincts to count and that first and foremost we will honour and be kind to ourselves and so we begin to master the preservation of our own energy and its transformational powers so that this vibrational output is a true reflection of all the dreams and desires we hold for ourselves, underpinned by an absolute faith, that would be impossible to shake, no matter what.

My first sexual experience was indeed transformational ... so much so that this transformation is still very much in play.

I hope that by sharing this now, we will all recognize something, somewhere; where we can begin honouring ourselves, where we can begin the process of healing the beautiful person in each of us that may have allowed him- or herself to be defined by something as small as someone else's opinion of them from so many years ago.

026

As a young child I recall knowing that what I was doing was to be hidden, kept secret.

And so I would close the curtains, the door, get under the covers, check no-one was around and place my teddy bear between my legs, clamping my thighs around him, his nose pushed onto my pubic mound, pressure building, and building until release.

I didn't know what I was doing. Sex and sexuality was never spoken about in my childhood, teenage years, or even adulthood. Still today it is a subject that goes unacknowledged in the family space and something I just had to figure out on my own, in many unhealthy and unsafe spaces.

From a young age, my sexuality showed itself, but I was somehow taught to hide it: that it was something to contain, withhold, deny, and keep hidden.

Today I am still undoing those lessons learnt at such a tender age: shame, denial, secrecy, disgust, dirtiness, fear ... and I dream a different reality for the young girls, and boys, exploring and learning today.

027

My first sexual experience with a woman was at varsity, and honestly that was a “what the fuck” moment.

We were two inexperienced people playing in a space they had no clue about, but were supposed to play in.

It was not a great experience.

At all.

It's unfortunate but I don't really remember my first sexual experience.

I was only four and I was not a willing participant. I was too young to give consent. I didn't even know what was happening to me, or what words to use to describe it. I do remember details from the four years of molestation that followed, painful details that have haunted me right into my thirties. The guy was my brother's best friend, ten years my senior, and much bigger than me. Back then I loved him in the way that one loves a brother and, as most predators tend to do, he used my love and my trust as a vehicle to invade my body, my emotions and my psychology.

I kept the secret of what he did to me until I became a teenager. I started lashing out. I was scared all the time. I cried all the time. I hated myself, my family, my life. Nothing brought me joy. So my mom sent me to a therapist and the long, slow journey towards understanding and sharing my story began and, even more slowly, I began to heal. Almost twenty years later and I am still healing ... I don't think the process will ever end and I believe that's okay.

Luckily I have a wonderful father, so I always made good choices in men. I fell in love and chose long term relationships over one night stands and so sex slowly became something beautiful, something I could trust, and something I didn't have to fear. For the first few years the sex wasn't particularly good. It takes a long time to build the confidence to tell your partner what you want, without shame or shyness. Given my unhealthy relationship with sex and sexual desire, this journey took even longer for me. I am engaged now to a wonderful man who treats me like a queen and respects every inch of my body and still I have to remind myself that I have a voice, that I have a right to ask for what I want, to say *no* when I'm not in the mood or feeling vulnerable.

I talk about my abuse as often and as honestly as I can, and when I do, I am almost always met with a similar story, a story of a girl or a woman who had to fight for her stability, her sense of self and her emotional survival. I am proud to call myself a survivor. I am proud of every day that I can get out of bed and grab the day by the horns. I've learned to forgive myself when I can't get out of bed because hurt and anxiety forbids it. Whether up or down, or somewhere in between, I know I am - and always will be - a fighter.

My first sexual exploration of my body and pleasure was with another girl my age. We were about eight or nine years old. We explored each other's bodies and our own pleasure for about a year. I have no memory of how we started or what triggered the desire to explore.

It was an interesting journey of figuring out what we liked and did not like. I remember when we were experimenting with clitoral stimulation and also with fantasy. One of us would describe a fantasy while we both stimulated ourselves. I remember saying that we needed to stop before we had an orgasm (at that point I did not know what it was called) I simply knew that when that happened the pleasure stopped or at least then the desire faded. So we focused on trying to keep the pleasure going and then stop before orgasm and then continue.

Looking back now I realise how alone and unsupported we were in this exploration. We knew that if anyone found out we would be punished and shamed for our pleasure and curiosity. We made sure that we were never caught.

I am grateful that I had the opportunity to explore in what was a safe friendship.

At the tender age of eight years old I experienced my first “French kiss” or should I rather call it a “Sloppy mess”. I think the only reason I remember it was because of how gross it was!

I remembered seeing girls and boys kissing with their tongues on TV, and thinking, “Ooooh I’d like to try that! It looks fun!” So I put it in the back of my head and carried on with my life as a young child.

My friend and I went to a barbeque with her family. The kids there were two boys (brothers), very good looking boys (even at that age I thought they looked good). We played around with them, climbed trees, I even remember seeing the one fall off the wall in the garden. Struck by boredom we decided to play a game . . .

* Spin the bottle * Truth or Dare! * In the game, when the bottle pointed towards you, it was your turn to choose someone to ask you a question or dare you to do something. So we played ... it was fun in the beginning. I got chosen twice and was dared to lick the wall, and then act like a monkey (innocent stuff), until my friend dared me to French kiss one of the boys. Everyone’s eyes went wide as I stood up and walked behind one of the brothers into a dark dingy water tower room. He was the same age as me.

We stood there briefly and I asked him, “Do you know what to do?” and he said (he lied), “Yes of course, I’ve seen it on TV.” As I went in for the kill, his mouth was wide open, and I put my mouth over his. Our tongues did some sort of sword fighting battle, his spit mixing with mine. Oh gosh! There was so much of it and I was mortified that it wasn’t good ... still tongue jousting I pulled away and wiped half my face (full of saliva) and said, “Thanks ... that was, ummmmmh, fun.”

As we returned to our friends they all giggled. I was red in the face and slightly nauseous. But I remember that day well.

P.S. I tested if his brother was a better kisser at the next barbeque. He was.

I remained friends with my first kiss until late teenage-hood when he unfortunately passed away. The day I heard, I shed a tear because he was a

part of my puzzle, a piece I got to place at the young age of eight and I remember it like it was yesterday.

Remember

So you've read some of these stories. Maybe they have activated a strong memory or emotional response in you.

For you to be able to speak about this with children you need to know where you what is important to you and what you feel. Otherwise you will be unable to speak with authenticity. If you are unable to speak with authenticity you will find it very difficult to connect in a way which has impact or is believable. Your superpower in these conversations is your willingness to show up and be vulnerable. So please take a moment to answer the questions and read the stories. Think not only of what you would wish for the children in your care or sphere of influence, but also what you wish for yourself.

Writing your story

We recommend writing what you would consider to be your own first sexual experience and when you had penetrative sex for the first time. You do not need to show anyone or tell anyone, it will simply give you an opportunity to reflect. This is essential. How will you be able to support children in this conversation if you are not willing to look, reflect, and unpack your own experience?

1. Write your story
2. Take time to reflect on your story using the questions below
3. If you have a safe emotional relationship/connection with someone, share your story with them
4. Then write another first time story
5. Take time to reflect
6. Then write another story

Reflecting on your experience

Use the feelings lists at the back of the book. It is very useful to help you identify your own feelings through this process. Remember when you can accurately name your feelings, you reduce the intensity of the feelings. Naming your feelings is a useful tool to share with children.

1. How did you feel writing your story?
2. What were the emotions you felt before, during, and after this experience?
3. What did you like or not like about the experience?
4. Is there something you would like to have felt instead?
5. What would you like to feel again?
6. What would you not like to feel again?
7. Would you like the children in your life to have an experience like you had?
8. What feelings would you like to experience in your next sexual interaction?

Feelings Lists

Open	Loving	Happy	Interested
understanding confident easy connected free sympathetic interested satisfied receptive accepting kind harmonious empathetic tolerant friendly approachable outgoing flowing flexible present listening welcoming embracing stripped revealed expanded exposed emptied sensitive susceptible loyal affectionate sociable	considerate affectionate sensitive tender devoted attracted passionate admiring warm touched close loved sweet gentle compassionate caring allowing non-judgmental appreciate respectful humble gracious patient honouring expansive kindly grateful	Blissful joyous delighted overjoyed gleeful thankful festive ecstatic satisfied glad cheerful sunny elated jubilant jovial fun-loving lighthearted easygoing mellow happy-go-lucky glorious innocent child-like gratified euphoric rapturous in good humour in heaven on top of the world	fascinated intrigued absorbed inquisitive engrossed curious amazed involved attentive observant amused thoughtful courteous intent focused drawn responsive attracted affected stirred intent awakened meddlesome inquiring nosy investigative impressed

Peaceful	Strong	Alive	Positive
calm good at ease comfortable pleased encouraged surprised content quiet certain relaxed serene bright blessed assured clear balanced fine okay grateful carefree adequate fulfilled genuine authentic forgiving sincere uplifted unburdened confident self-sufficient	reliable sure unique dynamic tenacious hardy secure stable honest composed self-affirming truthful supportive excellent perseverant responsible energized sane complete mature solid steady grounded capable robust adept efficient adequate accomplished able experienced skillful savvy	playful courageous energetic liberated optimistic frisky animated spirited thrilled wonderful funny great giving sharing intelligent exhilarated equal excited enjoying communicative active spunky youthful vigorous tickled dynamic compelling powerful potent lively energetic vital intense healthy	eager keen earnest inspired enthusiastic bold brave daring hopeful upbeat beautiful creative constructive helpful resourceful motivated cooperative productive exuberant in the zone responsive conscientious approving honoured privileged adaptable

Relaxed	Confused	Helpless
glowing radiant beaming reflective smiling grounded unhurried open-minded efficient non-controlling unassuming trusting supported fluid light spontaneous aware healthy meditative still rested waiting laughing graceful natural steady centered placid calm carefree casual collected nonchalant serene tranquil	doubtful uncertain indecisive perplexed embarrassed hesitant shy disillusioned distrustful misgiving lost unsure uneasy tense stressed uncomfortable comparing dishonest superior disdainful manipulative judgmental argumentative authoritative condescending demanding confounded distracted disoriented off-kilter frenzied blushing awkward	incapable alone paralyzed fatigued useless inferior vulnerable empty distressed pathetic distraught doomed overwhelmed incompetent inept incapacitated shut down cut off trapped weak sick nauseated fidgety trembling craving hungry squirming jittery woozy twitching compulsive

Angry		Afraid
irritated enraged hostile insulting annoyed upset hateful unpleasant offensive aggressive bitter frustrated controlling resentful hotheaded malicious infuriated critical mean-spirited violent vindictive sadistic mean spiteful furious agitated antagonistic repulsed mad cross incensed	loud reactive swearing abrupt quarrelsome venomous irate short-tempered stubborn rebellious exasperated impatient contrary condemning seething scornful sarcastic overbearing sharp poisonous insulting disrespectful jealous ticked off hitting yelling screaming revengeful retaliating reprimanding envious	fearful terrified suspicious anxious alarmed panicked nervous scared worried frightened timid shaky restless threatened cowardly insecure wary self-conscious uptight apprehensive attacking defensive dreadful guarded troubled self-absorbed rigid agoraphobic intolerant disturbed disrupted intimidated avoiding unwelcoming petrified unbending paranoi

Hurt	Depressed	
crushed tormented deprived pained tortured rejected injured offended afflicted aching victimised heartbroken agonised appalled wronged humiliated insulted withdrawn miffed indignant suffering distant invaded bulldozed bullied secretive slighted smothered belittled	masochistic stuck contracted tight blocked despairing hopeless grouchy off moody crabby fault finding resistant punishing morose cranky grumpy burdened negative closed out of sorts no energy in hell touchy haggard drawn slumped slouching achy	disappointed discouraged ashamed powerless diminished guilty dissatisfied miserable despicable self-denigrating self-hating sulky low terrible lousy desperate alienated bad pessimistic dejected bummed out self-critical self-deprecating gloomy glum disheartened down despondent cheerless rotten