


# I'M A SURVIVOR



"THERE IS A WAY  
OUT, AND IT'S  
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AWESOME WHEN  
YOU GET THERE."

Sometimes a series of unexpected events and rapid choices can turn a life upside down, but it's how you deal with it that matters...

**WARNING:** This story contains themes of suicide. If this raises issues for you, call Lifeline on 13 11 14

From the outside, it appeared that life was going well. In her early fifties, E was successful in her career in the community sector and was a proud single mother raising a "beautiful, gorgeous and special" daughter.

On the inside, she was silently struggling with financial pressures and the years of self-doubt.

Things changed quickly.

When her daughter finished high school and decided to study interstate, E decided to join her, seeing it as a way out. "Things had started to spiral out of control. After a nasty and expensive divorce, I had financial problems and the bank was chasing me to foreclose on my house loan."

She felt alone. "I'd worked in domestic violence and homelessness and didn't feel there was anyone I could talk to who wouldn't judge me because they were colleagues. I knew I was struggling with my mental health and was in a big mess."

Her daughter then decided to take a gap year rather than move south. Too worked up to heed the warning signs of her compounding situation, E took the first step in what would become a very difficult journey.

"I just ran, I couldn't wait. I moved south and left my daughter behind. I still feel incredibly guilty about it, even though she doesn't see it that way. I ran away from my obligations. I knew I was in trouble."

Landing in a new town with no job and no money at 54 years old, she hit a major crisis. "I couldn't pay the bank loans, I didn't know anybody and didn't have an income."

She bunkered down in her house and isolated herself as her thoughts turned to taking her own life. "I lay in bed for days crying and trying to think how I could just stop it all."

Rationally, she knew about calling Lifeline and reaching out for help but couldn't make that call. "I kept thinking they'd tell me to get a grip, that it was my own fault and no one would be able to see it the same way and I just needed to get myself out of it."

At that moment in her life, everything she had tried to push down and deny over many years came out. "I was in a big mess; I didn't know anyone or the local services to call. I'd lie in bed and think maybe the police would come or maybe someone would send an ambulance. I was just hoping someone would save me, but no one did – it was up to me."

Alone and vulnerable, she came to a powerful realisation that saved her

life. "I couldn't think of a way out that wouldn't hurt my daughter. Her father had abandoned her, and I'd left her by moving. I just could not take that next step of abandoning her totally. That's what stopped me. I realised that, somehow, I had to find a way through."

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She got out of bed and decided to look for work. As she submitted an application for casual work, she noticed a sign advertising a full time position perfectly suited to her experience. "The universe was looking after me. I pretty much walked into the job and that's what saved me, having an income again."

Continuing the steps to recovery, she went to a doctor for a mental health plan. "The recovery process has been amazing. I've learnt so much about myself over the last three years."

Recovery has allowed her to understand the signs she had been denying throughout her life. She had ignored bouts of depression - brushing them off as just thinking she had to toughen up. "Dad was an alcoholic which led me to think that things were my fault and to wonder what was wrong with me. Mum was physically violent towards me and my siblings because she was coping with Dad. In hindsight, I think Dad suffered from depression which he self-medicated with alcohol – not very successfully."



She also faced up to her financial troubles and declared bankruptcy. "I went to the Government website and found a registered agent who did all the paperwork for me – it was such a relief."

Upon reflection, she had never thought contemplating suicide could happen to her and had ignored the warning signs. "I knew I was reacting more to stress as I got older, but I didn't expect the suicide thing. It was just that moment in time when everything happened at once that pushed me. I'd been on antidepressant medication for a long time, had

a series of miscarriages when I was younger and found the pressure of sole parenting tough, but I'd just kept going."

Seeing herself as a "work in progress", she is now in a place where she can reflect on what the experience and her recovery are teaching her. "I have been being able to look back at my parents with a bit more forgiveness and compassion." She has also unfriended and unfollowed lots of people on social media who she recognises fed her feelings of inadequacy and "not measuring up".

She also now knows that no one has to do it alone. “I ran away from support. There would have been people who would have supported me and running away made it worse.” She wasn’t thinking clearly. “I know now that children of abuse sometimes have quite distorted thinking.”

Her key messages to others are to talk to someone and ask for help. “Trust your instincts. There will be someone who is willing to sit with you and just listen. It could be the hairdresser or it could be the barista you see every day. There’ll be someone who will ask how you are, and you can actually say: ‘not too good’. I can do that now.”

Another key learning is to be true to yourself. “Let go of the things that are just society’s plans for you, of the shoulds. There is a lot of pressure on women to be all things for everyone. It’s a very great relief when you can say: ‘I’m not doing that, I’m saying no’. I think I saw myself through other people’s eyes instead of thinking, who am I? I feel like in some ways my previous life was almost fake, like I was matching up to other people’s ideals.”

Looking back to the crisis point allows her to measure how far she has come. “It’s also a reminder that she never wants to go there again. “It’s a big monster in the darkness and I never want to see that in myself. I now have such a gift of having a sense of inner peace and of living life how I want to live it.”

Mental health is about self-care and finding your happy places. “Before I would have seen it as being selfish. I’ve been a victim in my own eyes and now is the time to stop that and take control of my own life.”

She has also discovered she is a survivor. “I survived probably the worst situation I could imagine and, if it does go belly up again, I will survive. I’m determined and I didn’t recognise that in myself before this experience.”

Strong relationships with people you love and trust are essential. “Trust that people will look after you if they can. My sister came as soon as she knew I was in trouble. It’s clearly made me aware how important it is to have my

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daughter and that connection with someone who I love dearly. I will do everything and anything to not break that.”

And the final message is hope. “There is a way out, and it’s actually pretty awesome when you get there. You have to give up on all the things that the world says you should be striving for and be who you want to be. There is a way out, but it may not be the way you expect it to be. In lots of ways, this has been a whole new life for me.”

**#storiesstrong**

## WHO TO CONTACT

**Lifeline 13 11 14**

**Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636**  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Suicide Call Back Service**  
**1300 659 467**

**Emergency 000**

*This article is part of the #storiesstrong suicide prevention campaign which highlights a series of twenty articles developed by a diverse range of people with lived experience of suicide and experts in the field.*

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For more information visit [www.gphn.org.au](http://www.gphn.org.au)

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