LGBTQIA+ Women's Visibility Project

An empowering portrait exhibition

Exhibition Statement

The LGBTQIA+ Women's Visibility Project is an inclusive exhibition of empowering portraits featuring 10 women from within and around Logan. Each portrait is paired with a personal story, poem, or letter that shares their lived experiences and perspectives.

By amplifying the voices of gay, transgender, gender diverse, intersex and non-binary women, the exhibition promotes connection, empathy and understanding to reduce stigma and change negative social attitudes that contribute to poor mental health.

We know that gender inequality and discrimination is compounded by the intersectionality of a woman's gender diversity, sexuality, culture and disability, but these things do not determine a person's success or abilities. They do, however, impact the way they are treated by others.

We're honoured to be able to share these deeply personal and expressive portraits to celebrate the ways in which women contribute, succeed and find fulfilment. Because all women belong and deserve to be treated with respect.

This project was funded by the Investing in Queensland Women grant program.

Portrait participants

- Astarea Rae
- Amelia Illing
- Brianna Hammond
- Jasmine Anderson/McGaffin
- Marie Bledsoe
- Rachel McConkey
- Stephanie Saal
- Storm Jury
- Topher Clark
- Vanessa Hood

Acknowledgements

- Jade Ferguson – Photographer from Visual Poets Society
- Stacey Bennett – Pastel Artist
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assorted grains inc.

Funded by

Queensland Government



Photography by Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society, 2024

Vanessa Hood (Nessa)

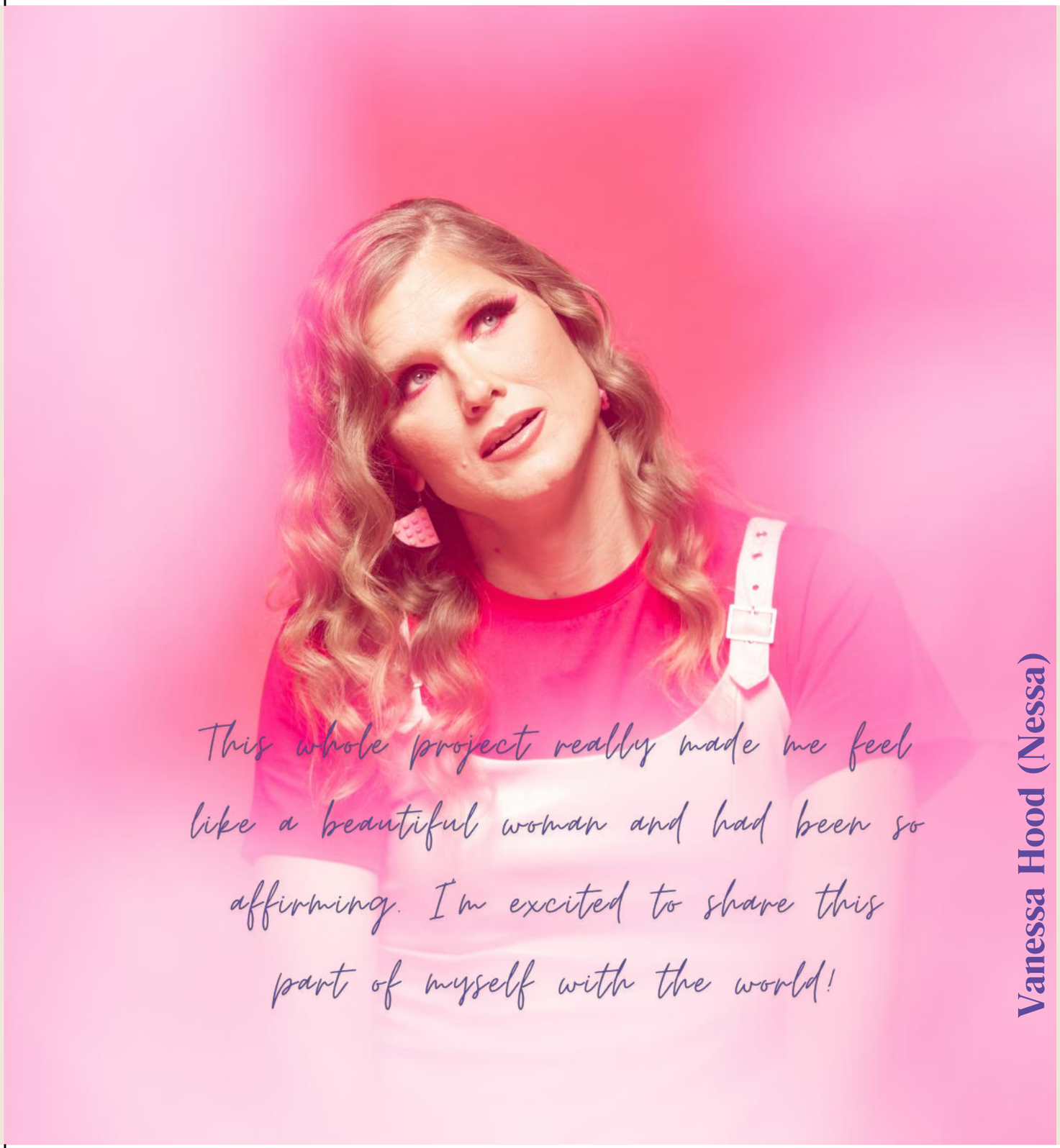
My name is Vanessa but I have been going by Nessa at work. I'm 43 years old, Australian and transfemme. I'm also pansexual, greysexual and polyamorous.

The people in my life I'm closest to are my children and my partners. My partners have always been there for me, while my daughter has felt like we have connected more since I came out as trans.

For the longest time I was very closeted, coming out in my late 30s. As a child I was a handful. I knew I was different from the others, struggling to express myself. This continued into adulthood.

As part of my self-acceptance, I shared my true self with my then-wife, which did not go down well. The changes I needed she had not signed up for, deviating from our original plan. That separation happened five years ago and really pushed me out of my shell. I became more outgoing and met a lot of wonderful people.

In typical transfemme fashion I'm in software development and my company has been excellent with my transition. Even before coming out to HR and changing my email address the coworkers who knew instantly accepted me.



Vanessa Hood (Nessa)

In my spare time I like to get away from the computer, spending time with my partners and kids. Going to karaoke, the beach, cycling, and cruising holidays.

I want my portrait to inspire others to stop hiding their true colours. Pink has always been a favourite colour of mine and only recently I have able to express that.

This whole project really made me feel like a beautiful woman and had been so affirming. I'm excited to share this part of myself with the world!

Stephanie Saal

Dear reader,

My name is Stephanie Saal, and I am a proud intersex and bisexual woman.

When I was born, the doctors couldn't determine my sex. They took me away from my parents to be tested. My mother never even got to hold me. They were told that I needed to have immediate feminizing surgery so I could be raised as a 'normal' child. Within days I was being operated on non-consensually.

The truth is that I never required this surgery, and should have been allowed to live as a child until I was ready to decide.

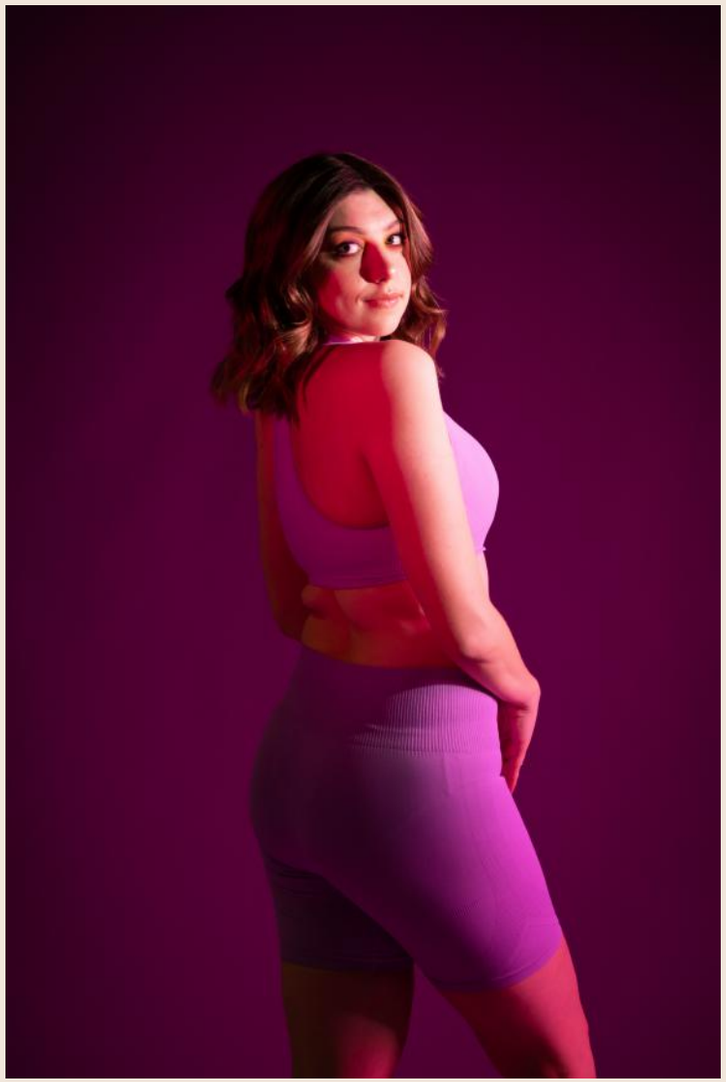
I was told I was intersex by my parents when I was 9 years old, and I've had to go through several recurring surgeries to affirm my gender.

I have had to work through feelings of severe isolation and shame due to the surgeries I was subjected to at birth. These surgeries have created further complications for me in life, from issues in my hormones to becoming infertile due to parts of me being carved away from a surgeon's blade.

I've been called a freak, monster, creature – almost anything designed to make me feel alone in the world. I've felt pain.



Photography by Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society, 2024



Stephanie Saal

But this pain has also created my capacity for compassion, and a need to see our systems in the world changed to ensure that we listen to the last, the least and the lost. I am proud of who I am, not because of what I am, but because I pick and love myself.

When you are capable of choosing yourself everyday, you can use your energy and passion to fight for others that you love. And if anyone reading this or seeing the portrait could take away any message, it would be to find your chosen family – your tribe – and wrap yourself in their unconditional love.

Find the people that see all of you, and want to love and protect you everyday as you do for them. Your tribe is our there waiting.

You are capable of choosing yourself everyday.

Marie Bledsoe

I Am Enough

I am enough, though you don't see,
A quiet light that yearns to be free.
I exist in whispers, shadows so thin,
Invisible woman, lost deep within.

I am the colors that blend in the crowd,
Muted tones, never too loud.
A bisexual heart, tucked out of sight,
Love in the margins, hidden from light.

Not gay enough, not disabled enough,
Not quite enough to call the world's bluff.
I'm here on the edges, caught in between,
A chameleon masking, unseen but keen.

I remove my glasses, blur my own sight,
To soften the world that's too harsh and too bright.
If only you'd pause, take a peek at what's real,
Beyond the layers I've learned to conceal.

See me, I plead, with eyes that can hear,
The quiet struggle, the unspoken fear.
Invisible battles, a world on my back,
A person of worth that your vision lacks.



Artwork by Stacey Bennett Art, 2024


See me. I am enough. I exist. See me. I am enough. I exist. See me. I am enough.
I exist. See me. I am enough. I exist. See me. I am enough
am enough. I exist. See me. I am enough. I exist. See me. I am enough. I exist.
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I am enough.
exist. See me

Rachel McConkey

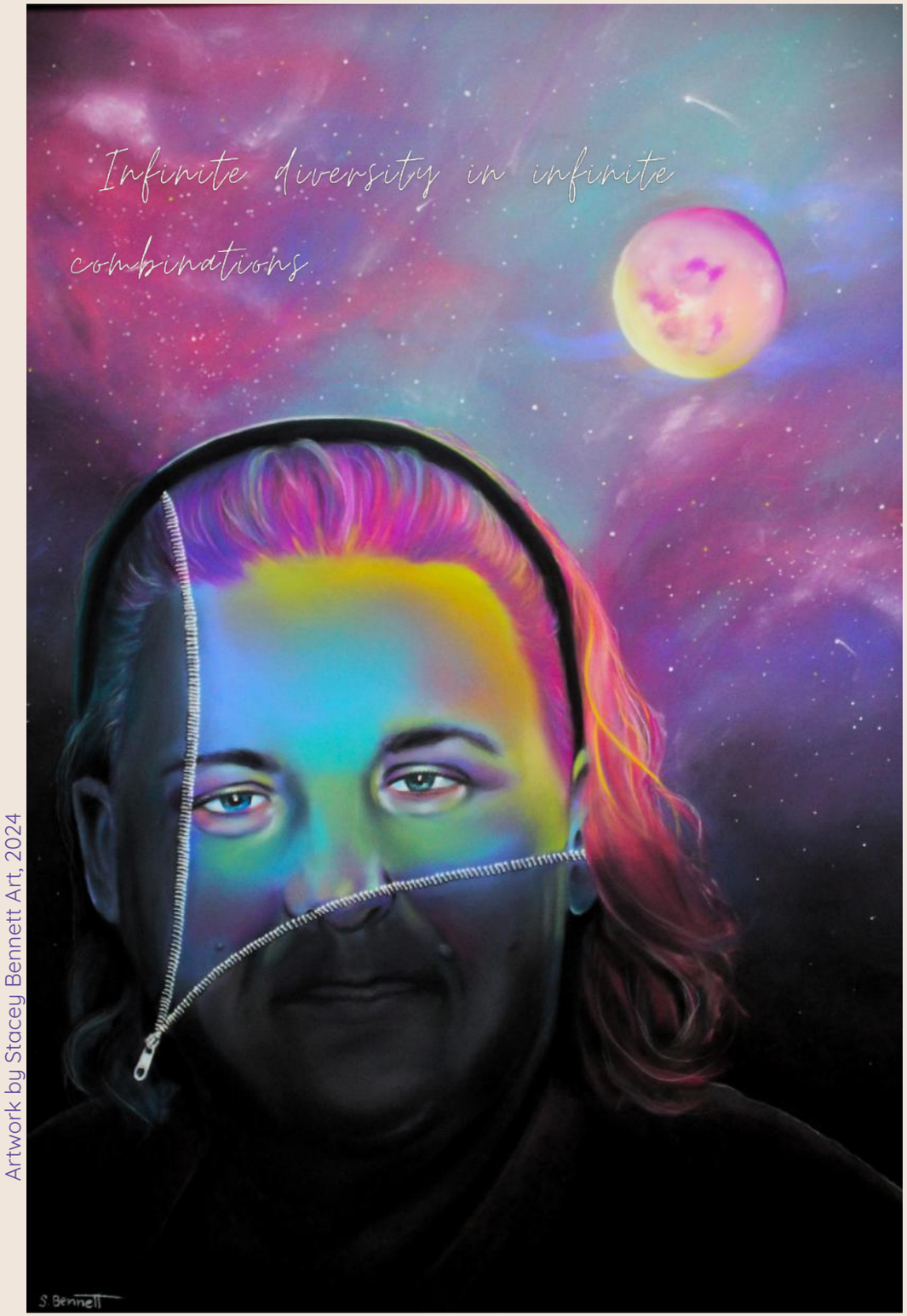
I'm Rachel. I'm 50 and have mild mental illness PTSD, anxiety. I am an Asexual female. I didn't start my new journey of transitioning until I was 47. I realised I was just burbling along feeling nothing, and I guess I started asking myself questions after the same sex marriage vote.

I had failed at most of the male things. Hated them. Then I asked myself, what if I wasn't male? My journey towards self-acceptance has been slow, agonising, deliberate but also rewarding.

Transitioning is scary. But through it all, I've realised that I do not owe anyone classic femininity. This is what I've struggled with most. I am she because I AM. What I look like doesn't matter. I don't owe a genuine female voice, looks or expected female behaviour to anyone.

I've always been attracted to the concept posited by science fiction, of a better future world without stupid labels: infinite diversity in infinite combinations. We are all different and that is okay.

I experience discrimination by being othered and left out, while also having unreasonable and impossible demands made of me. However, I want my portrait to convey that just because being yourself is hard, doesn't mean it's not worth it. And it isn't a reason for not doing it. I want people to find a gem of hope. Truth to oneself is the absolute necessity and I am no longer hiding.



Artwork by Stacey Bennett Art, 2024



Photography by Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society, 2024

Storm Jury

Hi I'm Storm. I'm a digital creative, professional photographer, Mum, rollerskater and Trans Lesbian.

The people I'm closest to in my life are my wife and daughter. They are my entire world – they have brought me a type of happiness I didn't even know existed.

Before transitioning I didn't think that parenthood, family life and everything it entails would be possible for me. I didn't transition until later in life partly because I didn't really even imagine that I could be a wife to amazing woman and a mum to an incredible child. Being trans is overwhelming in a culture obsessed with the gender binary, heterosexuality and enforcing feminine and masculine roles.

I never felt a lot of dysphoria or a hatred for myself, I just needed more freedom to express myself more honestly and to figure out how to do that. I wish I hadn't waited so long to transition just because of my need to make other people comfortable and happy.

In fact, coming out was a big deal to ME but most people around me were not very surprised. It did unlock some pockets of discrimination in surprising places.

I noticed that some people have a lot of fear about people they care about being trans, because of the potential for discrimination and the issues they will face because of it.

Coming out can also be a great way to let people show you their true nature, if they are judgmental and small-minded it becomes very obvious. But usually, acceptance comes from the most unexpected places and it's pretty wonderful.

I really love my portrait photo. It does show who I am. It was a very fun experience to be on the other side of the camera for once! In my spare time I help organise and promote Gay Skate which is an all-ages skating event for LGBTIQAP+ community, families, friends and allies. Gay Skate is a popular way for queer community to socialise in an inclusive, fun and safe space – its focus is on creating queer community, culture and joy.

I believe it's really important for older queers to be celebrated and for younger people to have an opportunity to meet others just like themselves – if they can see it, they can be it. I'm really proud of this community project and invite everyone to attend.

I want other trans people of any age to see this portrait feel inspired and confident to be themselves. You've got to find the belief in yourself to move towards being your true self – in all kinds of ways. It gets easier every day.

I believe it's really important for older queers to be celebrated and for younger people to have an opportunity to meet others just like themselves - if they can see it, they can be it.

Storm Jury

Topher Clark

My name is Topher, I'm in my early 30s. I'm neurodiverse, mentally ill, pansexual, non-binary.

My journey towards self-acceptance has been mostly easy because I've been in a safe environment where I can flourish and express myself even though I do feel imposter syndrome regularly I have two amazing people in my life that validate me and help me become more comfortable in my gender Identity.

I came out in my early 20's after holding back when I was heavily involved in the church. Coming out to the people around me was the best thing I did and while some people didn't approve, it showed who really cared. I have lost jobs and been told by clients I'm "too gay".

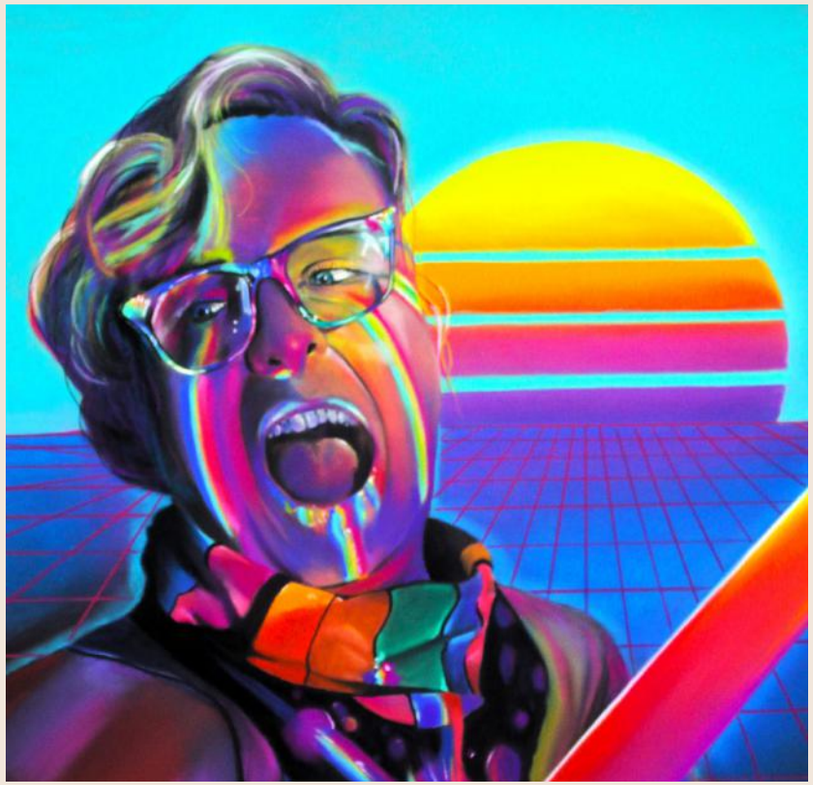
I have had slurs thrown at me in the street to which I give a cheesy grin or smartass comment back. I've struggled with people not taking me seriously and pushing me to the back because of how I dress.

My father would also laugh at me and refuse to be seen with me when I went out in public with him in "fem mode". Thankfully, I have two wonderful partners – Sammy and Vanessa. They're wonderful because they constantly make me happy and feel safe in my own skin.



Artwork by Stacey Bennett Art, 2024

Topher Clark



You are loved, you are unique,

YOU ARE AWESOME!

I'm happiest when I can make a difference in someone's life with my own experience and that I can help people and lift them up. My love languages include performing, crafting and cooking for people. I love fire twirling, crafting, art, music, gaming, driving, building my tribe and adventuring.

My portrait screams, "HELL YEAH! I'm here!

I want people to feel emboldened when they see me being me with my whole heart. I want them to feel inspired to do the same. Unfortunately, it's not easy for everyone, but just come out and be who you are. Find your tribe. You don't always have to be "out" and not being "out" doesn't make your experience any less valid.



Artwork by Stacey Bennett Art, 2024

Brianna Hammond

Why did I hide from this beautiful, happy, intelligent and tranquil woman? I feared that I would be rejected and wouldn't be accepted for my trans identity. I thought if I ever did transition I would just move away, start a new life as the version 2.0 me, cutting off all contact with family and friends and nobody would ever know. Okay, it was a dumb idea and the reality is you need peer support, employment and accommodation. But most of all I crave intellectual stimulation that I would never get living out the back of nowhere, probably without my ABCNews TV and Radio. Oh, the new me also likes the feminine identity and the attention of men! Why didn't I see that coming?

Growing up in Sydney's western suburbs in the 1970s and in a football family provided a very cis heteronormative schooling – you can't be gay or queer or it will be belted out of you and that is easily understood. I liked girls so I thought it was just some weird thing I was weak about and needed more self-discipline. Even after moving to Canberra in the 80s where Ainslie had a queer scene I just kept within the dominant paradigm. I'd take this secret to my grave. I had career ambitions and maybe even political goals, but dreaded the thought of being exposed and the subsequent humiliation. I didn't see myself reflected in drag identity, so I was just really screwed up, right?

I thought marriage would finally rid this curse from me.

Nope, the instinct to be authentic would not leave me. As the relationship grew deeper, as I thought, the compulsion to dress and appear feminine consumed me. If there was an opportunity to dress feminine or get away for a day or so, get my nails done, rid my body of hair and tan then I would take it travelling away from where I am known to venture out as Dannielle. Eventually my secret was discovered.

There were definitely initial feelings of embarrassment, ridicule, shaming and humiliation by my ex. But as I became more confident in transitioning to the real me, my confidence grew until the day she moved out. I was single and lonely, but for seven months I existed without support, being shown less emotional compassion than the family dogs – she would talk to them!

My hair had been growing out and I got my ears pierced. Towards the end of 2020 my youngest daughter told me I was an embarrassment (I heard her mother's voice) and that I wasn't welcome at her graduation. When the family house finally sold, it was two of the most barren years in my heart as my daughters shunned me and I hated it. But other areas of my life bloomed. Accepted in the workplace, in community groups, in social contexts and then meeting new trans and queer friends. I excelled at being me.

Life was about to get better. I secured my own accommodation in Nambour, my daughters started visiting for dinner and within months they were staying two days

Brianna Hammond

a week! Balance had returned to the universe. Then I got further good news about gender reassignment surgery. 2023 was the year of the planets aligning.

The lesson is you don't need to hide from yourself. You can be who you really are. Those who genuinely love and respect you will stick with you all the way. Those who you counted as superficial friends will slip away into the abyss that they belong – unsupportive, a one way relationship, leeches!

I love my trans identity and I'm proud of who I am. Everyday I'm authentic.

If there is one thing I want you to know, it's to just BE YOU!

Amelia Illing

Photography by Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society, 2024



Hi, my name is Amelia, I am in my late 30's and was born and raised in Australia. I am a female however my journey to becoming my true self is different from the societal norm. I'm commonly labeled as a transgender female.

Through my transition my friendships have changed and evolved with some surprising and unexpected changes. The initial response was positive, making me feel that I would be able to maintain my established friendships with minimal ruptures. This was not the case, and a lot of my pre-transition friends have become very distant. This has not been the case with my family who have been so supportive of my transition with my relationships and connections getting stronger with them.

While I have lost a lot of friends, I have also gained some of the most supportive and my most valued friendships. These individuals know who they are, and they have changed my life for the better. It is so important to have support to help you through your tough times and I feel so grateful that I have friends I can really rely on as they can on me.

I would also like to highlight the support that I have had from my workplace, which has become a safe place for me to escape.

Amelia Illing

A lot of my colleagues have known me before and through my transition. While I have a strong professional and respectful relationship with the team, my bond with my working team has a lot of elements consistent with friendships. This has built my support networks within my workplace that I am able to lean on if needed.

One constant in my journey has been the support of my 3 little children. While I do have guilt from the potential challenges of having a parent outside the gender norms, they have been what has gotten me through many dark times. I have always loved being a mum and feel through this transition the connection with my children has gotten stronger.

Like many who experience gender dysphoria the signs were present from a very young age. Growing up in an era where people generally misunderstood and sexualized the transgender community, this created many barriers. Of course, this wasn't just limited to the transgender community, the stigma applied to anyone that fell outside the "social norm". This created an inner fear of my own diversity and an environment that fostered deep suppression of my true self. I developed chronic anxiety and depressive symptoms including self-harm and suicidal indentation, which I became very good at hiding.

After many counselling sessions and GP visits, and I am beginning to accept that it is ok to be me however, the acceptance is still hard. I still have trouble accepting the fact that I will never be truly female.

All I know is that I am on the right path, and I will keep working towards reducing the gap between the body I was born with and my internal being.

The accumulative effect of dealing with subtle, discriminatory gestures takes a toll. When we think of discrimination we tend to think of direct comments or actions. But often it's a simple as being the last in the room to be acknowledged, not getting served and people not looking at me.

Also, some of the discrimination I receive now, aligns with a cis gender female experience and this has been something I have needed to get used to. Presenting as a male for most of my life I never noticed the little advantages and ease of navigating an array of different areas.

Things like trying to get your car serviced at a mechanical workshop, feeling unsafe walking home alone and feeling like your opinion doesn't mean much.

I know it sounds cliché, but my children have been the only thing that have kept me going through some very dark times. And so I wanted my portrait to display me, a normal woman, with her kids enjoying her life, no different inside to any other cis gendered female.

I feel that transgender women are displayed in many negative ways such as confused, mentally ill and sometimes over sexualized. My aim in life is to remove this stigma and normalize the view of transwomen as just normal people no different to anyone else.

This is what I wanted my portrait to represent.

Everyone's experience is different and uniquely special. It's okay to be you and follow what you feel is right. Embrace your journey of self-discovery, believe in yourself and trust your own feelings.

Remember that this is your experience that only you can truly understand, seek help and support from others, however, don't let their experiences determine your journey.

I wanted my portrait to display me, a normal woman, with her kids enjoying her life, no different inside to any other cis gendered female.



Amelia Illing



Photography by Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society, 2024

Jasmine Anderson/McGaffin

My name is Jasmine India Rose Anderson/McGaffin. I'm a 38-year-old transwoman and wish to be addressed by she/her pronouns.

While being transgender is a part of my journey in life, it isn't all I am. I'm a strong willed, patient and resilient woman. I'm a passionate loving person with a generous mind and spirit. I have a sassy and often sarcastic sense of humour and the ability to relate and understand everyone I've encountered in my life.

I'm the one always there to support and offer a shoulder to those close to me. I am or have been a daughter, sister, wife, girlfriend, aunt, friend, best friend, granddaughter, mentor, boss, businesswoman, artist, model, influencer, hair and beauty whiz. I run several trans support and social pages and for many years ran a LGBTQIA+ inclusive business.

I'm also a trans model trying to represent and show that just because you are trans doesn't mean you are limited to what you can achieve or do with your life.

I'm from a farming family and grew up in the country where life is often quiet and you have a lot of time to think between doing regular chores. You also have a lot of family expectations on your shoulders and as the first-born child in the family, I felt that a lot.

Jasmine Anderson/McGaffin

I probably also internalised that expectation and beat myself up about it continuously thinking there was no way I could be who I needed to be, to be happy in life. I was always different from my brothers and the more I tried to suppress my feelings/mannerisms the more they'd surface.

No one really asked me how I was feeling or tried to understand, and I was often treated more harshly than those around me in an attempt to correct my nature. Their explanation was that they were preparing me for how harsh life would be once I was out on my own in the big wide world.

So, there comes the catch, the treatment was borderline abusive and harsh, but it did harden me up and make me more resilient as a person. I knew the value of hard work and took that into my life whether it was job related, how I presented myself and how I looked after myself.

I learned early on not to rely on anyone but myself and to a large extent I'm still like that today. I have found over time I've softened slightly and I'm more willing to let people in but to be part of my inner circle is something rare and exclusive. As a result, relationships have always been hard for me.

I was outed at 14 and lived as a gay man until I found the courage to transition at 31. Relationships up until that point were difficult as my partners never had a clear understanding of who I was fully. I tried to be happy but internally I was spiraling.



It took me until I opened my own business to feel like I was ready for that step. I was also with a very supportive partner at the time and while we ultimately split up, he's still to this day one of my best friends, (well, almost a brother figure). He even came to my wedding.

From the moment I made that decision there was no looking back. I wanted to feel completely me and completely at ease in my body. Hormones were really what saved my life. I had been depressed, suicidal, self-harming and suffering with terrible body image issues and anorexia for most of my teen years and early adulthood. Transition made all those things go away.

Jasmine Anderson/McGaffin

The dating/love game for a trans person is one of the scariest things I've ever done. I'm a heterosexual woman so I only date men, and the men that are interested in us tend to come with their own issues.

Most of those you'd encounter online, etc want to fetishise and sexualise a transwoman. They act as though our existence is to please them sexually or be the experimental toy. That may be attributed to the pornography they see and limited trans visibility that's on television, in magazines or on social media.

In my quest for love I've been both physically and sexually abused, degraded and humiliated. This also makes you naturally less trusting but there are good men out there. Men with genuine feelings who are here to build a life with you, to love you and to be your biggest cheerleader. I'm lucky enough to have encountered this love twice, so I encourage you not to give up on the idea, to be patient and when you least expect it love will come.

My hope is that by sharing our stories that we make being trans less taboo and educate the public that we are not something to fear, we aren't mentally unwell creatures. We are functional members of society that just want to be given a fair go like everyone else.

That's supposed to be what it's like to be Australian. I hope that trans people of the coming generations won't have to suffer the abuse, misinformation and obstacles that I and many people of my generation have faced. I hope that access to trans health services become easier to access and more affordable.

The dating/love game for a trans person is one of the scariest things I've ever done.

If I could offer any advice for a young person going through a similar experience I'd tell them that life is too short to delay your own happiness.

You know who you are better than anyone else so dig deep and do what's best for yourself. Remember it's called a journey for a reason so you don't need to rush the experience and your body needs time to catch up with all the changes you wish to make.

Jasmine Anderson/McGaffin

Make sure you have a great support system around you. Everyone's trans experience and journey is different so don't fall into the habit of comparing yourself to others. We are all unique individuals with our own perspectives so remember that there's only one you.

You are stronger than you will ever know and making that decision will be the hardest thing you will ever do, but it's also rewarding. There will always be someone who understands you, loves you for you and respects your mind and body. Don't settle for less than you deserve.

What I'd like people to realise is trans people aren't the enemy. We aren't here to disrupt your life or to devalue your connections to other people. We just wish to be treated the same, we are all human after all and not that different to you. If anything, we offer a unique perspective in life as we've seen life through both a male and a female lens. We've often had to overcome adversity and can give insight into how to deal with difficult situations. We are from all walks of life and a wide range of careers and talents; we are culturally diverse and a range of sexual orientations.

Ultimately, we want the same thing, respect and understanding and love. Treat everyone how you wish to be treated, it's as easy as that.

If you're unsure how to address someone simply ask them how they wish to be addressed. If you make a mistake that's okay, we are all still learning. Simply apologise and make mention that you will try harder. Blatant disrespect won't be tolerated though and as a result of continued disrespect you may be cut out of someone's life. A little effort on your part can make a world of difference to someone who is struggling.

I hope this letter helps people slow down and consider someone other than themselves for a moment. Consider how lucky you may be to have the life that you do and where possible offer support or understanding to someone in need. I hope to humanize a group of people who have been suffering lately due to misinformation in the media.

We need to end the obliteration, murder and mistreatment of people who are just trying to be their authentic selves. Trans people aren't going anywhere, we've existed for generations and will continue to do so. It's about finding some peace with that and just allowing us to get on with our lives without persecution or threat to our safety. We are stronger together.

It's been great to reflect on how far I've come personally, but also how much as a society we still have to do.

Let's be better

Love, Jasmine

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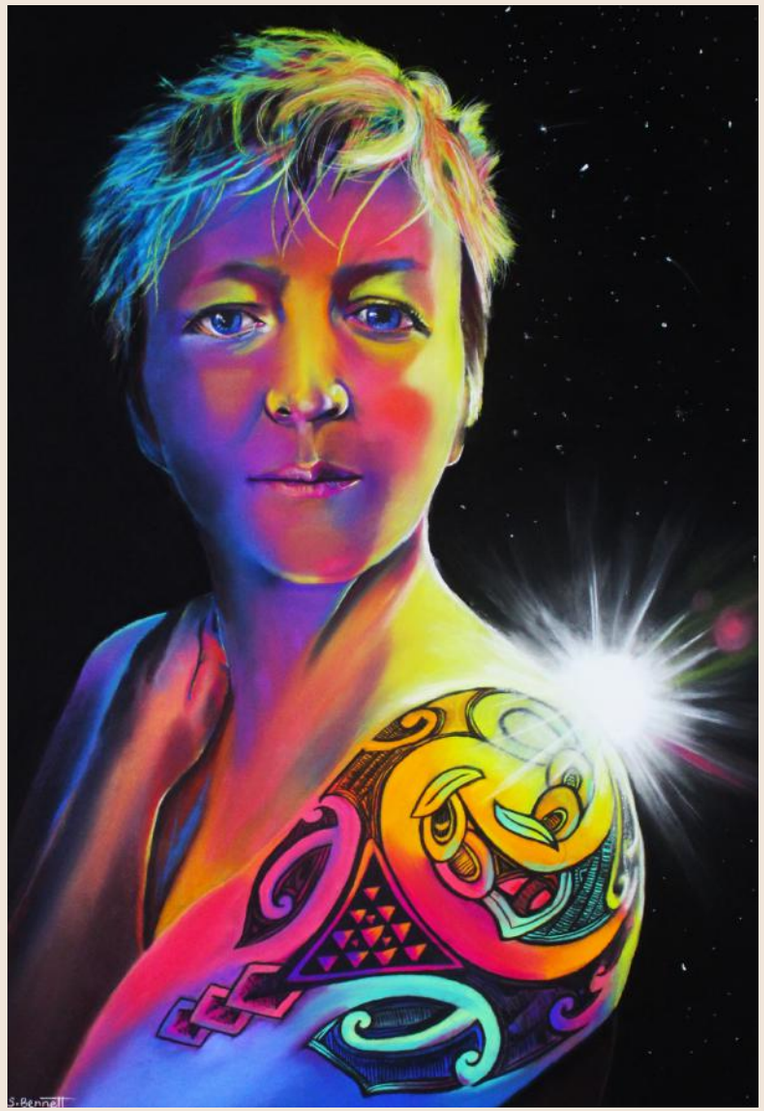
Artwork by Stacey Bennett Art, 2024



For the last 45 years, my story has been one of Sexual Abuse, Rape, Domestic Violence and Survival, and let's throw in a few other life-altering tragedies along the way. I could go into detail, but I have since realised this is not my story. Instead, it is a false illusion of who I think I am but not who I am at my core.

Four years ago, I got diagnosed with a benign brain tumour, and a couple of months ago, I was told that it had become unstable, that it was growing fast and that I had a year to live if they didn't operate immediately.

This changed and stopped my life in a heartbeat.

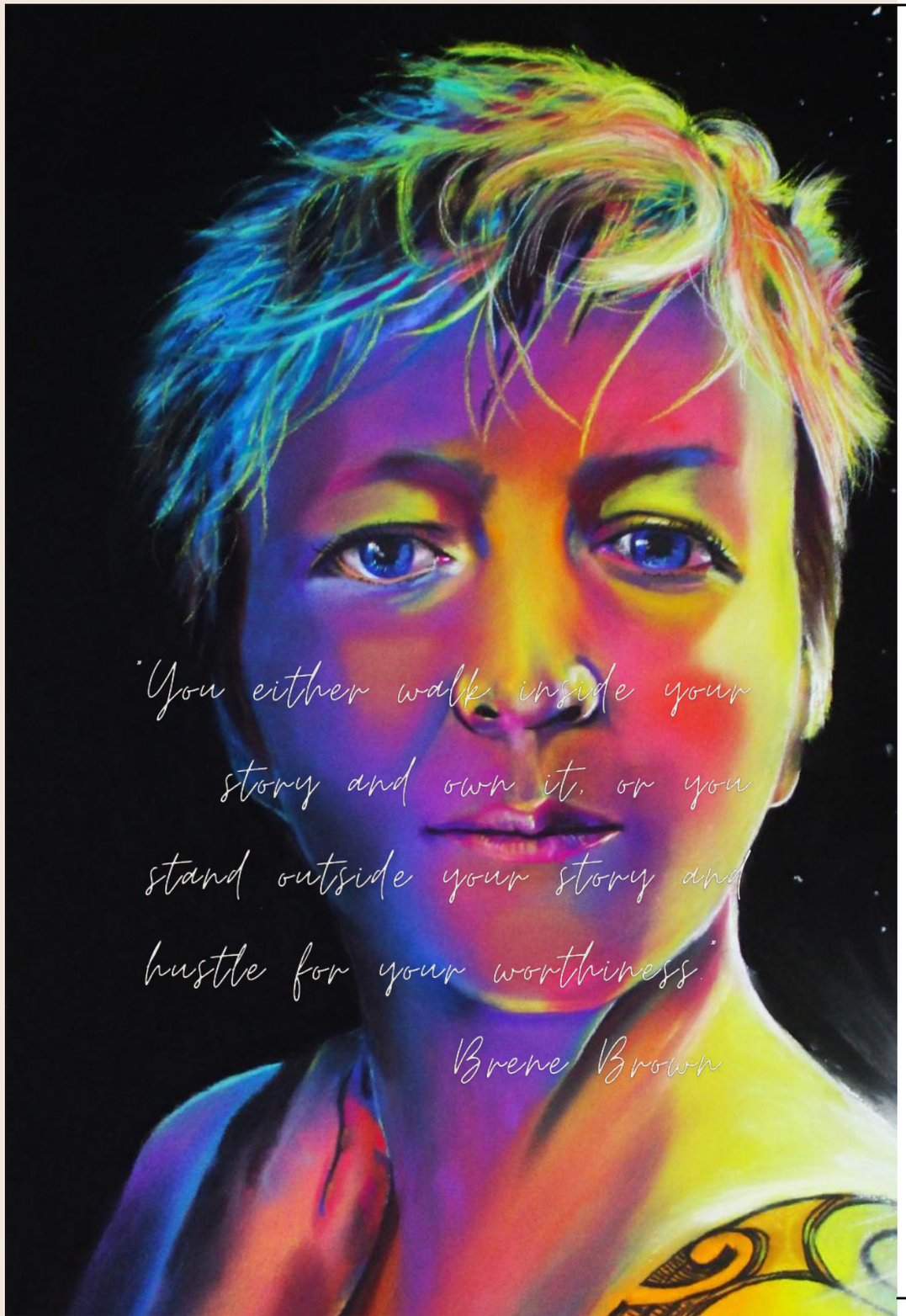
My tumour stripped me back from everything I knew and believed about myself, the good, the bad and the ugly. It left me feeling naked, vulnerable and exposed and contemplating life and my mortality. Within this dark moment, I was approached to do my portrait and share my story.
My first thoughts were, hell no!

I was still fighting and struggling with some of my demons. I hadn't found closure in the events surrounding my abuse. Surely this wasn't my story? Surely this wasn't the end? Thoughts and feelings of unworthiness surfaced along with other crushing beliefs. But in a moment of weakness, or perhaps bravery, I said yes, let's do it.

If you peel back the layers of my trauma and abuse. If you strip away the core beliefs that crippled me for so long and that I identified with so strongly, I see a child, a woman, a soul who, despite all her adversity, has a fighting spirit, an open heart, whose gift in life is to serve others who have experienced similar. I see someone who holds hope for others in a place where they can't hold it themselves. I see resilience despite the odds against her. I see an unwavering faith in life and humanity despite the pain that both have caused. I have witnessed her triumph against cancer, trauma and abuse, and I have constantly seen her fight and pull herself together in moments where she wanted it all to end. The bravest moments I have ever seen are when she has stepped into life's arena and said, I am here!

My portrait is my truth. I am vulnerable, but I am strong. I am exposed, but I am safe to be seen. There is a balance between light and dark. My tattoo represents my mana, pride, life force, energy, and strength. It's taking back my power and my autonomy. It's reclaiming back authenticity and lineage. It's embracing the warrior and the wise woman within, and most of all, it symbolises my legacy in moving forward.

I no longer choose to hustle for my worthiness. This story is one I am proud to own!



Dear Reader,

I want to invite you for a moment to place your hand on your heart and reflect on these words. I hope you can slow down, pause and breathe and give yourself the credit you deserve. I hope that you can see just how resilient, brave and strong you are for pulling through every difficult situation you have faced in your life.

I hope you allow this realisation to be with you and ground you through any other obstacles or roadblocks you face. I hope you can see how capable you are and that no matter what adversity you encounter, you have the courage to keep looking forward, growing, and healing.

I hope you can wake up each morning, look in the mirror, and say I love you and am proud of you. I hope you can stand steadfast in knowing that you are worthy, loved, and never alone.

My name is Astarea. I'm a life coach, counsellor, mental health support worker, spiritualist, and death doula. I believe that within each of us is our Authentic Self. That part within us that is untouched and untainted by the world. I believe we are all born with a higher purpose, and part of our journey in life is to rediscover who we are (outside of our adversity) and to find union with our true selves.

I have often said that the greatest journey we face is the journey towards self-love.

I took part in this beautiful project and chose to share my story in the hope that you can see that there is light within the dark. That there is hope within the pain. Happiness can exist within the chaos, and healing can take place.

I hope you can see that no matter what has happened to you, this does not take away from who you truly are. I want you to know that you are not alone. That you will find allies along your path. You will find your soul tribe. You will find people who can hold hope for you in times you cannot.

If I could give a message to my younger self or yours, it would be;

Never let anyone determine your sense of self-worth. You are one hell of an amazing person. In fact, if anyone makes you question your worth, ask if they are worthy of you! Surround yourself with people who are going to champion you. People who will be your most prominent advocate even when you are not in the room. You are loved, you are worthy, and you deserve an amazing life. Do not let anyone make you feel otherwise.

My final message would be that life is short. Don't put off for tomorrow what you could do today. Don't take life for granted. Live in the present and live for now. Cliche, I know, but trust me, We never know when it will get taken away.

Love yourself, and love yourself fully. Allow yourself the opportunity to know you, the real you! Not your story, not who you are because of your adversity but the real you, behind all of that. Your Authentic Self. You might be amazed at what you find!

Jade Ferguson, Visual Poets Society



It has once been said we do not remember days; we remember moments. And for as long as I can remember, I have been toting a camera in an effort to capture these moments.

I have always believed that to photograph a moment means to not only capture a subject in its natural state, but to preserve the emotion the experience creates.

Stacey Bennett, Pastel Artist



Stacey Bennett is an award-winning pastel and street chalk artist based in Jimboomba Queensland.

She's always been interested in human faces and their stories. She believes every life has a purpose and a unique story that needs to be captured and documented.

Thanks to all women; past, present and future, for paving the way for others and for sharing your stories with us.