

The background of the cover is a light-colored brick wall. On the left side, there are several embroidered flowers. One is a large, light-colored flower with a green outline and stem, and several green leaves. Below it is a smaller, solid purple flower with five petals. Another green leaf is visible at the top right.

LINDA PHARAND

MY  
STRENGTH,  
MY  
POWER

*Linda Pharand's Story  
and Messages from Other Strong Women*



## About the author

### **Linda Pharand was born in the 1950s and raised in the Flour Mill area of the City of Sudbury**

She is the sixth of 10 children, with four older brothers and five sisters – they grew up in a loving family.

On the night of Saturday, October 17, 1970, she was the victim of random, brutal sexual violence that forever changed the course of her life. Back in those days, sexual assaults were kept quiet, victims made to feel small, and experiences swept under the rug. On the eve of her 70th birthday, Linda proudly releases this publication to make her story and experience public. She shares her healing journey (that spans more than five decades) to bring comfort and support to others who have suffered sexual violence of any kind, and continue to raise awareness of this pervasive issue that is still dominant in today's society. The embroidered flower on the cover is Linda's needlework, and symbolizes strength, transformation and femininity.

Today, Linda is a spunky, strong and independent woman, with a positive outlook, a playful nature, and a contagious laugh.





Centre Victoria  
pour femmes

Centre Victoria pour femmes (CVF) is an organization offering support, assistance and advocacy for the independence of all francophone women who have experienced, are currently experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence.

CVF is publishing this brief account of Linda Pharand's and other women's healing journey to shed light on the importance of writing and, above all, sharing in such an experience.

CVF receives funding for a variety of programs to support women who are experiencing or have experienced some form of violence – intimate partner violence, sexual assault including incest, rape or fondling, and any other form of attack on a woman's personal integrity (physical, psychological, emotional, financial, etc.). Our primary funding comes from the provincial government through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, North Region.

Thanks to this funding, as well as donations from individuals in our communities, we can undertake projects, such as Linda Pharand's publication, that shed light on the experiences, the achievements and, above all, the resilience of women. Hope is an important, if not essential, driving force in any journey of personal growth.



## PREFACE

### Word from Linda's cousin

After more than 50 years of living with the consequences of a brutal attack (being beaten and raped), Linda Pharand wanted to tell her story. She did so in a short writing that her friends, including Le Centre Victoria pour femmes, wanted to help her publish. Linda knew very well that writing her story was an important step on the path to wellbeing (yes, even after 50+ years). This applies to anyone who has survived a traumatic experience. Recounting it is an act of taking back one's power. Linda has never stopped working toward rebuilding herself, and this publication is her testimony.

Over the course of many years, we came to know Linda very well at Centre Victoria pour femmes. Linda likes people – she wants to help them. She also knows that by sharing her life experiences, even the most difficult, she can help others. Her book is her way of helping, of evolving, and mostly, of claiming her place. Despite the fact that Linda survived a horrific act of violence, and her experience is difficult to comprehend, the woman whom we have come to know is generous, loving, determined, intelligent, brave, firm, and obviously, very capable.

When this tragic event took place, I was just a bit younger than Linda. I will never forget the moment I heard about it: it was Sunday morning (the day after the attack), and I was at St-Jean-de-Brébeuf Church to do volunteer work. I did not know Linda at that time, because we attended different schools. I was filled with disbelief that such an attack had taken place. More to the point, it was beyond my understanding to grasp how someone heals and simply continues to live after such an event. Even though this experience was not mine by any means, it affected me profoundly. That

life would allow Linda and I to cross paths so many years later is a blessing and a gift, since I have been a witness to part of her healing journey and her determination to live life despite her trauma.

Linda likes to tell everyone that she and I are cousins. She can clearly explain our connection, since my grandfather and hers were brothers. In French, we would be considered “*cousines de la fesse gauche*” (related through our “left cheek”), meaning that we are 3rd or 4th cousins, or far removed.

Linda is passionate about ancestry and enjoys researching her heritage. She likes to talk about her findings and knowledge and can tell the how, when, and why of this aunt and that uncle and so on. In addition to this skill, she has a great memory that makes me a bit envious. She can name names easily, and explain who precise ancestors are, as well as their connection to one another. What an awesome talent!

Linda is a great example of tenacity and resilience. Despite a major trauma that happened some 50 years ago, has left her physically scarred, continues to disrupt her life, and deprived her of important experiences, Linda has succeeded in maintaining a positive attitude and a frank and open outlook.

It is a real pleasure and privilege for CVF to have been able to support her story-writing project because we completely agree that speaking one’s truth is an act of bravery that can be crucial on the path to wellbeing. That act also has the potential to help someone else, because knowing that others have survived means that we are not alone.

We chose to further highlight Linda’s act of bravery by inviting other women in our surroundings to speak and write about their journey, to share a message of support with Linda and whomever else is in need. We received a variety of messages, each and every one an outpouring of resilience, courage, tenacity and strength. I believe we all possess these qualities for the simple fact that we are WOMEN.

Having social and community networks is an important social determinant of health. This book, its testimonials and messages, and all of the people who supported the realization of this project, form a social network that has contributed to Linda’s wellbeing while at the same time contributing to our collective wellbeing.

A number of people were involved in making this book possible. It is often said that “it takes a village to raise a child”; it indeed took a community of friends and generous people to help share Linda’s story in this public way.

A special thought and thanks go to Tante Simone. Linda’s aunt passed away a few years ago, but not before strongly encouraging Linda to write her story.

A thousand thankyous to Linda Levesque, a translator, for agreeing to translate Linda’s story and the testimonials in this book. Somehow, life brought these two Lindas together at just the right time. Linda showed great willingness to work on this project, and her patience and generosity are very much appreciated.

Another big thank you to our graphic artist, for her professional design work that captures the essence of both femininity and strength. She did not hesitate to say yes to this project and worked on it wholeheartedly to help make Linda’s dream a reality.

To OJ Graphix in Espanola who produced the numerous copies of this book, please receive all of our gratitude. You helped to make this project concrete and achievable.

Finally, let Linda Pharand’s voice ring more loudly, bolstered by all of the voices in this project – all of the words and acts of goodwill. What matters most is that Linda, and all of the women who shared messages and stories, did not give up. They did the exact opposite by taking control of their lives. They have gone from being victims, to survivors, to being ALIVE AND LIVING!

*Gaëtane Pharand*

*Director (and Linda’s cousin)*



## CHAPTER 1

### A Young Girl from the Flour Mill

#### *Childhood*

I was born on July 23, 1954, at St. Joseph Hospital. I was a quiet child. When I started speaking, I had a speech impediment, and had trouble pronouncing words.

I started school when I was six years old. I was a student at a French school called *École Sainte-Marie*. In grade one, I had a hard time talking, and the kids used to laugh at me and make jokes. Some of them used to beat me up. Some teachers were very good, but some were witches. They weren't very kind. Instead of defending me, they only laughed when the kids made fun of me. Thankfully, my mother helped me with my homework, and with reading books.

The bullying at school made me feel really angry. I wanted to beat those kids up. When I was a little girl, I would never swear, but after I started school and was bullied, then I started swearing. I was mad all of the time because of kids hurting my feelings. Sometimes, I didn't want to go to school – I hated school.

Around that time, in 1965, I started going to the Youth Centre on Saturdays, and I enjoyed that. The teacher who taught us to craft was very nice, and understood a lot of things. But I had to stop crafting when I broke my leg.

I was unlucky in Grade 2: I broke my left leg. I had to repeat the second grade twice. And then in Grade 3, I broke my left leg again, and I had to repeat Grade 3 as well. At last, I passed and went to Grade 4. In this grade, the principal advised my mother to bring me to see a specialist at the sanitarium for my speech impediment. The specialist told my mother that I was going to grow out of it. This made me feel good because I realized that I would not always have this speech impediment.

I knew I was having problems in school, and I knew I had speech problems. But my mother was a good school teacher, and she helped me a lot with my homework. The help she gave me allowed me to keep up in school. I didn't like to read books in those years.

Back during that time, children in the schoolyard were very cruel. From my own experience, I know that children grow with encouragement and acceptance. This is why my speech impediment was so hard for me, the kids and teachers at school tried to make me feel different. Today, I realize that my speech impediment wasn't that bad. I was a child learning, just like every other child.

In 1968, I went back to the Youth Centre. After that, when I finished elementary school, I started attending Collège Notre-Dame high school in Sudbury in 1970. My schooling was getting better. I was in a special class, in level one. My work at school was really good.

I used to be involved in classes there, like modelling, where we learned to fix our hair and put on makeup. We learned how to walk properly while wearing a dress. We also had other kinds of classes like a crafting class to make things out of leather. When I heard that there were dances on Saturday nights, I started going to the dances.

Around this time, one of the girls was expelled from school. She had been making a dress, and the teacher asked me if I wanted to finish making it. I said yes. It was a really nice dress with a bit of green and yellow, and half sleeves. The skirt was pretty short for those days – a mini skirt. I really liked it, and other people said it looked great. I didn't know then that I would be wearing this dress the night I was attacked.



I also made another dress that was brown, and very nice too. I had a white jacket, and it all looked really good together. I liked wearing all of these clothes to the Youth Centre dances. It made me feel like a young lady who knew how to dress well.

### *Saturday, October 17, 1970*

That morning, when I got up, I had things to do in the house. In the afternoon, I asked my mom if I could go to the dance at the Youth Center, and she said yes. I was very happy to be able to go and see some people that I knew.

I got ready. I would say at about 4:30 p.m., I took a bath and washed my hair. I had to blow-dry and fix my hair, and put makeup on. I had supper, and then I got ready. I put on my dress. It was the yellow dress that I finished making after the girl from school was expelled, and I looked really good in it. Before I left the house, I said goodnight to my mom, and she told me to be careful. I said yes, of course. But I never made it home that night.

I went and caught the bus to take me to town to go to the Youth Centre. The bus stop was at Mackenzie Street and Elgin Street, and I had to walk there. I had to go up a little hill, and walk in front of the old police station.

That Saturday night of October 17, 1970, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped Mr. Laporte from Montreal. It was the night this man was killed, and I was assaulted and raped.

My life changed that night. I was brutally raped, beaten and left to die. I was only 16 years old.

I was coming back from the dance. It was 12:30 at night, and I was going home. I was walking on Notre Dame Avenue, and I crossed at Pembroke Street, the short street, and I turned right down Bridge Street. I had to go down a hill on the other side and then had to go up another hill. There was a bad curve. There was a big hole in the fence.

When I came up the hill, he was waiting for me.

He grabbed me around the neck. He started punching me in the face. He dragged me about 100 metres towards Junction Creek, severely beat me at times, using a rock on my head. And then, he raped me. He left me to die. If I had rolled into the creek, I would have drowned. This was where I spent the night. It was very cold on the ground.

About the same time that night, my brother came home, and my mom asked him if I was there. He said yes, because he thought he had seen my coat at the door. But one of my sisters had nearly the same coat as mine, hers was a bit darker colour. My mom woke up during the night, and went up the stairs to look in my bedroom and check on me. I wasn't there. She woke up my brother, and he drove around to try to find me, but he didn't.

### *Sunday, October 18, 1970*

Hours later, I was found. It was Sunday morning, October 18. An older lady found me on her way to 9:00 a.m. mass. She went knocking at a door on Bridge Street – there was one house in the middle of Bridge Street. She told the person who answered the door that there was a body beside the creek. The lady in the house called the police, and then she called my mom to ask if I had come home last night.

Mom asked what was going on. The lady at the house told her that a body had been found beside the creek. Mom cried, “Oh my God, it's my Linda.”

The police arrived. My brother and my father were there. When my father saw me, I was on a gurney, and he didn't recognize me. The men put me in an ambulance, but I put my arm up. One of the police said it was a good sign. Some people saw me when I was beside the creek. They said I looked awful. This happened in the fall.

When I was in the emergency room at St. Joseph Hospital, one of my cousins saw me that night; she was working there. A doctor examined me, and found I had two black eyes. My left eye was so very bad, they thought that I was going to lose it.

The attacker had punched the left side of my face, and had broken my jaw. He had punched my lip, which left it paralyzed, and all of my front teeth were smashed. He had broken my nose. He had picked up a rock, and hit me on the left side of my head. Still now, I suffer from memory loss and severe headaches. He had hit me in the stomach with a rock that had left me black and blue. Then he had raped me.

### *Initial Medical Care*

Over the five days when I was unconscious, I had a nurse who talked to me. Her name was Marguerite. She would tell me, “Linda, you will come out of this. You will be very strong.”

One of my brothers was sitting in a chair beside my bed. There were two police officers at the door. They told me my face looked like a football. I was not allowed to look in the mirror, as my face was so severely damaged.

My mother was not allowed to visit me at the hospital because seeing me would have been a big shock for her. My dad worked at the mine, so he came to see me when he had a chance. I had younger sisters at home. One of my sisters came to see me at the hospital. Her visit made her very happy. One of my cousins came to see me with his wife too. My sister-in-law, my oldest brother’s wife, used to come to see me after work.

The dentist didn’t put my left jaw back into place, he just left it like that. He put braces in my mouth. I could not eat, but I could drink liquids.

I came home the second week of November, and had my braces until the dentist took them out on December 21. My little sisters were so happy to see me at home. I missed a lot of school for three months in 1970.

I went back to school on January 4, 1971. I found it very hard to go back. People asked too many questions about what had happened that night.

During that time, I also saw a local dermatologist about my face and lip, but he couldn’t fix them. He sent me to see Dr. Carlson in Toronto in the summer of 1971. I had to go to Scarborough General Hospital.

Dr. Carlson repaired the left side of my lip, which is paralyzed, and I have no feeling in it. I was in Scarborough Hospital for a whole week. I was alone, and my mother could not come with me because my little sisters were at home.

In 1972, I had to go back to Toronto again to Scarborough General Hospital to get my face sanded, on account of the scars. I was in the hospital for two weeks. I had to come home on the bus. I was alone. It was in the wintertime, and it was very cold. I had to miss school because of my surgery. This is because Sudbury didn't have the right operating machines in the hospital to do the medical work I needed. That meant I had to go to Toronto. I had to grow up very fast and be very independent.

### *Continuing Medical Care*

Then in 1987, in November, I was sent by Dr. Buba Jr. to Toronto General Hospital for a consultation with Dr. Symington Sr. In January 1988, I had to go back to Toronto General Hospital for surgery on the left side of my jaw. I was in the hospital for only two days.

Again, I had to take the bus to come home. I didn't like that, but I was careful. I didn't want anyone sitting beside me, but I had no choice. The bus stops many times along the way to Sudbury. It was a long ride.

In May 1988, I had to go back to Toronto for surgery inside my mouth by Dr. Symington again. I was in the hospital for two days.

In 1994, a local doctor, Dr. Villa made me an appointment on November 25 to see Dr. Symington for a consultation for the left side of my jaw again. This time, my mom came with me just for one day. We left on the last afternoon bus to come home. My mom found it hard on her to travel on the bus because of her back.

I had to go back in January 1995, again for surgery on the left side of my jaw. I was in the hospital for two days, and it was very hard for me to travel on the bus from Toronto to Sudbury. I had to go back to see Dr. Symington

for a follow-up in February, but I had to cancel that appointment because I was sick. In the spring of 1995, Dr. Symington Sr. told me to get a plastic form for my mouth and sleep with it on account of my broken jaw and the arthritis pain that I had.

I had been under Dr. Bill McMullen's care since May 1977. Now, I have been in Dr. Dan Krawczuk's care for a long time.

On December 9, 2005, I had surgery again, but it was for my nose by Dr. Barr. I had a total of 20 surgeries to fix my jaw and lips.

My physical wounds healed, but I was plagued by emotional trauma for years. I was always sick with headaches. I had to quit school and never accomplished my dream of becoming a registered practical nurse. I was too busy fighting for my health. I still suffer with arthritis in my body. I am still under a doctor's care because of my injuries. I continue doing things for my health.

### *My Life Has Changed*

While the physical damage incurred during the attack was bad for me, I was also left with emotional trauma that would plague me for years. I developed a drinking problem, and became depressed (PTSD), twice attempting suicide. I turned to food for comfort, and my weight crept up to 200 pounds.

Around 1998, I was getting counselling from Rosa Marie, who worked at the Sudbury Rape Crisis Centre. I guess she left the Centre a few years later. She moved to another country. After that, I saw a different counsellor every time I went, and they were nice. I used to go twice a week, but they told me to come only every second month. Then they closed the centre because they were having problems.

During autumn of 2008, it was very rainy and I was having flashbacks of my assault and rape. I think I was going into another depression. I went to the Centre Victoria pour femmes. It was October. The executive director of

the Centre Victoria called my new counsellor. Her name was Nicole. I was with her for about eight years. We worked together, and she helped me a lot. At one point, she asked me to participate in Take Back the Night, but it took many years for me to feel ready.

When I decided I was strong enough to do this, it was September 19, 2013. My counsellor and I started by going back to where I was assaulted. She and I went to the old Bridge Street area, though the bridge is not there anymore. The old wood from the bridge remains. I was looking across Junction Creek, and I walked to the place where the assault happened. While I was looking down, something lifted off my shoulders. I felt my happiness become greater than my anger.

When the Take Back the Night March started, we started shouting: “We are not punching bags, and don’t you forget it.” I am the one who started that. I am getting stronger for me.

My anger is getting better, and I’m laughing. I was never this happy; I was always angry at everything. But something changed in my life, and it shows in my eyes that I’m happier being me. I feel good. I just have a little anger, but it’s going away very slowly. I have changed my life. I read books and I do handiwork, embroidery, and I make some of my own clothes. I love that very much.

When the weather changes, my body changes, and I am very much in pain, due to arthritis from the injuries. I will be like this my whole life.

Some people tell me to get over it, and there are some who tell me they know what I’m going through, but I think they’re wrong. They don’t know what I’m going through.

When this rape and assault happened, there wasn’t a centre for counselling at that time, nor for a long time afterwards. I was mad at everything around me. This wasn’t my fault. I don’t call him a man; he is not one. I think he is the devil who does not have a heart. He is cold. How could he do those things to a young woman? Real men don’t assault and rape us, ladies.

Meanwhile, I heard people tell stories about me, saying unpleasant things – they were all lies. The rapist ruined my ability to trust men. For a long time, I could not even bear talking to them.

When I tell them what happened to me, they think I'm dirty, and they don't want anything to do with me. I never married or had children. This creep who raped me might be a grandfather today, but he took that away from me – the possibility of being a grandmother. He took everything away from me.

When I was living at home, I found I felt safe in my bedroom or in the house. When I moved out of the house to an apartment, I was not very happy. I was scared the attacker would come after me again. I was living in an apartment building, and had to put one more lock on my door. I also kept a big knife under my bed. But I never told my mom that I was scared.

In 1996, I made a big change in my life. Twenty years ago, I sought counselling and gradually turned my life around, working through my emotions, guilt, and alcoholism, and keeping to a strict diet.

May 16, 1997, was my first time at the Sudbury Sexual Assault Crisis Centre. They were on Durham Street. I had two counsellors. The first one helped me very much with my anger, but she had to leave because of illness. The one who was still there on Durham Street, Rosa Marie, was very good and helped me with lots of things.



## CHAPTER 2

### New Beginnings

As a young lady, I took a modelling course at the Youth Centre, a long time ago, on Elgin Street. Later in my life, I was talking to the manager of a women's clothing store, and asked if they needed someone to work in their in-store fashion show. She said yes, and seemed very happy to include me.

The fashion show was on September 12, 2015. I had to be there to try the clothing, which was of very nice colours for fall. The customers and ladies had their invitation forms for the fashion show at Northern Reflections at the Rainbow Centre. Afterwards, the manager and ladies all said that I had done a very good job.

In the spring of 2016, there was another fashion show at Northern Reflections. After that, I did one more fashion show, this time at the United Steelworkers Hall. It was May 26, 2016. The clothing was very beautiful in colours ready for summer.

The manager of the store asked me again if I would do more modelling and I agreed. I had to try on clothing for fall and winter. It was September 2016, still at the Northern Reflections store at the Rainbow Centre. Sometimes, the store was filled with ladies there for the fashion show. I really enjoyed modelling the beautiful clothing of nice fall and winter colours.

During spring 2017, I went to see the manager of this store to ask when the next fashion show would happen. I had good timing, because the next day I had to be at the store at 1:30 p.m. to try on clothing. The day after that, we had our fashion show at the store. It was a Friday night and I had to be there from about 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. We were to do this show at the United



Steelworkers Hall on Brady Street. There were ladies there to fix our hair and do our makeup. I had done a very good job on myself, and my hair was very nice and so was my makeup. There was a lot of nice clothing, but it was expensive.

In the spring of 2018, I had a fashion show event in the store. I enjoyed being a model; it helped me very much. On May 2, 2018, I went to see the manager of Northern Reflections, and she asked me to try on the clothes. There were lots of summer dresses, capris, tops, and other summer clothes. Then on Friday, May 4, 2018, the show was from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., again at the United Steelworkers Hall.

We spent about two years doing these fashion shows at this hall. I had lots of fun. I'm not very tall and have to be careful what I wear. It has to fit very well, and the colour is important to make me look good.

My last year of modelling at Northern Reflections was 2019. The manager at the time had to stop working because of hard times in her family. I was having a hard time of my own in the building where I was living. I had to move out in November of the same year.

I enjoy living in the building where I am now. It's a quiet building for me.

As I write this, COVID-19 is unfortunately still around, and it is very hard for all people. I had an appointment for the vaccine in April 2021. The next day and for the next three weeks, I slept long hours until the vaccine started working. My next appointment was in August 2021. During the second lockdown, a lady from NISA (Northern Initiative for Social Action) started to call me every second week, because I could not go to the office.

In October 2020, it had been 50 years since my assault. Sometimes, I find this is still very hard on me. The police never did find him.

I am proud of the work I have done. I can only hope that something good will happen to me.

This is a true story. It is my story.



*Testimonials and messages of support*



During my young life and into my teenage years, I dealt with abuse and neglect from my mother. My father worked away, so for two weeks at a time, my sister and I were stuck with my mother. She continuously put us in dangerous situations, with dangerous people, and she also manipulated me. She brought all kinds of different men into our lives, which caused more damage than good.

I had to protect my younger sister from these situations throughout the years so that she saw very little of it. Even when my father decided to take charge, and have full custody of us, my mother would blame me and put me in the middle. I was forced to grow up quickly due to all of this. I went to seek counselling because I felt defeated. The abuse that I had endured throughout the years affected my self-esteem as well as my confidence. I didn't understand how a mother could do this to her children. My counsellors took the time to listen to my story, believed what I was saying, and helped me make sense of it all. With their support, I was able to find my voice, regain my confidence, and set healthy boundaries with my mother. My counsellors also took the time to help me put safety plans in place for my sister and me.

The support I received helped me put in place the proper precautions to keep my sister and me safe. I am very grateful for the help that I was able to obtain on an ongoing basis.

*Anonymous*



In my marriage, I suffered a lot of emotional abuse from the moment I had my daughter in 1999. Afterwards, things progressed, going from verbal to physical abuse. My husband would push me, squeeze my arms, and call me bitch, slut and other names. He would expect everything done without helping out, and then would get angry if they weren't, and lash out at me or the kids. The last two years of our marriage were the worst, and I ended up with a major depression that paralyzed me from the waist down. During my time off work, my husband didn't acknowledge me or help in any way. My biggest mistake was looking for attention and love outside of my marriage. When I went back to work, I confessed my emotional affair to my husband, and that led him to continue his abuse, which escalated into sexual assault. I fully realized then that I was being abused, and it took me about a year with the help of counselling to make the decision to leave him. I took my kids and moved in with my parents. Some months later, I was provided a house through Sudbury Housing.

Then, I met a man through online dating. At first, he was nice and caring. We were together for eight years, and he lived with me for about two of them. Once he moved in, everything changed. He expected me to do everything but cook. He had suffered an injury, and used it as an excuse to avoid going out on dates or doing anything with me. Since I worked full time, I never knew what he was doing, but suspected he was cheating. He became emotionally abusive, and had a temper. I put all my energy into his well-being, fixing him, and totally forgot about myself. Finally, the last straw was finding a letter from a creditor under my name, and learning that he had defrauded me of about \$8,000. I kicked him out, and knew I needed help again.

I am so grateful that I found the strength in September of last year to be single. I received some support, found myself again, and am able to take care of myself. I can now see what I want in life, and know that I don't need a man to survive. I'm working on my goals. I have lost weight, and feel so much better health-wise. I have reduced my debt from \$70,000 to \$20,000 over the past year. I also found out what was causing the numbness, tingling, and weakness in my legs that stopped me from working for seven months. I am fully recovered now, and know this was due to stress trauma from the abuse I received throughout both relationships. Today, my kids are grown, and I am living on my own. Doing the work my counsellor assigned in the last year, and talking through my issues with her have helped me grow into the amazing woman I am today. I now see her only every two months to stay focused on what is important to me.

I am very appreciative of the help that was available to me, and I recommend others to not be afraid to get support when they need it, because they do not need to go through hardship alone.

*Nicole Laurin*



I have to say, my life's journey hasn't always been easy!

It's really my approach to managing life's obstacles that has allowed me to get the job done. The support I received in the community also helped me to succeed. In fact, my journey has been more positive because of the moral support and tools I received to overcome what life has thrown at me. I know I made the right decision by asking for help from excellent service providers. By taking part in events and counselling, I also met some wonderful women and created true lasting friendships. Together, we have learned to listen to one another, and to be empathetic towards each other too.

Thank you to all of the women who have supported me along the way!

*GT*



Healing isn't linear... that's what I've learned. I've learned to go at my own pace. That if my wellness techniques work today and not tomorrow, it's normal. That my emotions are valid. Trying also means taking back the keys to my life. There's no one who can take away my power if I decide to love myself, believe in myself and give myself compassion as I would give to my sisters.

Take it one day at a time. Do what's best for my well-being. If today I don't have the energy to clean the house, that's okay. If today I only had enough energy to go to the bathroom, that's okay. If today I want to cry, that's okay.

Because, one day, I'm going to have the energy for the joys of life. One day, I'll be able to be proud of myself and my journey. One day, I'll be able to love myself. If that day wasn't today, maybe it will be tomorrow. And that is enough for me.

*LC*



What exactly is perseverance? For me, it is having a clear goal, objective and vision of where I want to go, and knowing the actions needed to get there. I have come to understand that the road is not always easy, clear, obvious and linear for the soul, but one must carry on despite the obstacles. Without much thought, I followed my instincts, mind and values, and realized that there was an invisible force guiding me, even if I didn't believe in anything at the time.

For more than 30 years, my greatest desire has been to find peace and confidence within myself, to create my own life. It has been a difficult, endless, constant journey filled with observation, analysis, retrospection, support and perseverance. To go forward and carry on, the key word for me has been "Why?" Why am I like this? Why am I struggling so much? Why can't I do this? I have nevertheless gone from victim to survivor, and am now ALIVE! What a gift, a relief and a release!

To summarize, there has been abuse, incest, exploitation and sexual assault along my journey. Because of this, I have had to push away certain people that I loved so that I could heal, and I worked relentlessly to overcome the addictions, the addicts, the beliefs, the fears, as well as the emotional dependence. Fuelled by anger, I had the courage to accept my responsibilities, and work on one thing at a time until I felt better. It was like peeling away the layers of an onion. Along the way, I handed back to others the things that didn't belong to me, and came to understand that everything I had done in the past was a question of survival, ignorance or simply repeating patterns. With the power of perseverance, the most difficult thing has been to forgive myself, let go of the past with its suffering, injustice and ignorance, and move towards the light of love, peace and harmony.



It was hard work... I stumbled and carried on with an understanding that there is no magic pill – I just needed to do the work. Of course, nothing changed until I accepted my responsibilities and took action. Today, what is important to me is showing appreciation to the people who guided and supported me along the way, and recognizing where I have been so that I can focus on where I am now. Thanks to this new outlook, I was able to take back MY POWER. Whether it was a fight for power or control, whether I was a victim or a prisoner to a persecutor or saviour, I followed through so that I could be free and carry on my path in peace with myself.

Shining a light on my suffering made me wake up and understand that, above all, I had to learn to love and accept myself as I am. I realized that I needed to stop blaming and hiding, denying my suffering, because life was going to pass me by. It is a process and openness that lead to light and living with joy. One step at a time... ease, love, flow!

*Caroline Lantaigne*



Prior to 1970, women in Canada had no one or nowhere to go to obtain help if they found themselves in an abusive situation. If you became caught up in a bad situation, and maybe being stalked or threatened, you might try to talk to a police officer who would then say, "It was up to you not to go out with this person." How was someone supposed to know that maybe there was a problem before you became familiar with said person?

Today we have Genevra House, Fem'aide, Centre Victoria pour femmes, and others to help. A person can contact any one of these places when dealing with an abusive partner, friend, or family member. Also, police officers have been made a lot more aware of this issue. An abusive person might even have already been flagged by the police.

But... I think we still have a long way to go with the general public's attitude that the abused person was asking for it, was lying, exaggerating, or being melodramatic. That is when we realize that calling a counsellor is now a real privilege, and a great help to us who are living or have lived through these situations/circumstances.

*Bonjour, your Friday friend*



My dear Linda, I am so proud of you! You have reached your goal of completing your book.

Since my childhood, I have not had an easy life. When I was very young, I had to learn to live very differently than other girls did. For several personal reasons, I became shy, timid, and abandoned by the other girls. However, I was lucky to have good parents, and to grow up surrounded by so much love.

Now I am a manager with 33 years of experience in my career, and I have often had to deal with intimidation and harassment from male managers. Since I spent so much time putting other people's needs before mine, I suffered a burnout and depression that forced me to stop working.

During all of it, I considered myself lucky to receive help from a service where I met other women, like me, who had suffered hardships throughout their lives.

With the support of a great counsellor, I made the journey to learn to love myself as a woman, be less vulnerable, and suffer less hurt than I had in the past.

I know that I'm a special woman with a lot of love to share with others, especially my cherished women friends.

Today, I continue to enjoy life to the fullest!

*RTK*



Circumstances in life are sometimes chosen, and others are completely out of our control. Some families are loving, caring, and supportive, where you feel loved, safe, and free to be. On the other hand, some families are toxic, cruel, and judgmental, where one is left with feelings of self-hate, fear, and unworthiness.

My life began in an extremely toxic environment, where there was physical, mental and verbal abuse, and basic needs were often not met. I consider myself to be the black sheep of my family. I was raised with five siblings and both parents. There was no drug or alcohol abuse that I am aware of.

My choices of partners were a reflection of my family dynamics. I started to believe that I was the problem. I believed that it was normal to be treated in an inhumane way, for it was my experience in many of my relationships. I WAS THE PROBLEM... No matter how hard I tried, nothing was ever good enough. Married 11 years trying, 11 years being mentally abused, financially abused, 11 years unsupported, 11 years worthy of nothing. My strength came from my true gifts, my daughters.

I knew in my soul that it was not right to be so badly treated. I had no understanding of why someone would marry you to mistreat you, for my own heart was full of love and best intentions for all. How could I be living in someone else's lie? It finally came down to two choices, either I take my own life, or leave and not look back. I fought with myself for almost two years, preparing myself mentally for "THE DAY". Without support from anyone, I took the step and left. It was a long difficult road that came close to breaking me. I made a promise to myself that I would fight for my truth, for my freedom to be me.

Today, I am free to be my true self. I looked deep inside for my truth and my accountability. With my will for peace, I peeled away the labels that were given without acceptance, peeled away the labels I carried of my own doing. After many years of work, and once I removed all who darkened my soul, I was finally able to feel the warmth and love from the light that shines within me.

A soul's journey is truth to self, and it is OK to put up boundaries to protect your beauty. Your soul is a garden that needs rain, sunshine, pruning, and love. Your beauty that lives within grows with all good things that belong. Your beauty dies little by little when weeds slowly spread over the garden you are working so hard to cultivate. People we meet are seeds that are given. What seeds we choose to sow must be treated with love and care, just like water and sunshine feed the garden.

Your inner beauty is your hidden strength, your truth, and it is also your freedom. Your beauty is YOU!

*LP*



As I sit here tonight thinking about my marriage, I ask, “Where did it go wrong?”

A man I thought would be my forever quickly turned into someone who held power over me.

After countless nights of crying myself to sleep, years of therapy, and working on our relationship, I have yet to see a difference: in myself, and our relationship.

I am not alone anymore. I drew up all my strength and took back my power.

I have a long way to go in my healing journey. But I know who I am now... and I do not feel guilty.

**I WILL NEVER LET ANYBODY MAKE ME FEEL POWERLESS AGAIN.**

No more will I tolerate abuse, disrespect, and fear.

I deserve better.

*Natalie Levert*



This past summer, I learned that Linda Pharand was publishing a book – I knew she would succeed! She is a determined woman who has wanted to tell her story for a very long time.

Her goal was to find meaningful words that would reach women who have lived through tragic experiences like her own. Furthermore, Linda recognizes that writing is therapeutic, and maybe other women would be inspired to follow in her footsteps.

You have every reason to be proud, Linda – you are a role model of courage and resilience to us all!

P.S. I hope that my dictionary proved useful for your writings.

*Danielle Gervais*



I experienced domestic violence for many years. My pain was an unbearable weight inside me, and I felt a tumultuous mix of wrenching sadness and burning anger. For a long time, I carried invisible scars of this terrifying life. At night, I would battle against the nightmares that took me back to the darkest moments, leaving fresh traces of terror in my already battered mind.

When I walked through the doors of Centre Victoria, I was a broken soul, bearing the scars of physical, verbal, psychological and emotional abuse inflicted by my partner and then by my son, men for whom I had made so many sacrifices and whom I cherished. So much sacrifice for a family that was now broken.

But at the core of my vulnerability, by going for help, I found a haven of safety and unconditional support. There were pitfalls on my path to recovery, and my self-confidence was destroyed, but with each step forward, I regained control of my life.

At first, fear and pain were my constant companions, but through the support sessions, I learned to give voice to my hidden suffering. I learned that there are many kinds of violence, physical, psychological or verbal, all having just as much impact. I learned that the abuse I had suffered was not a reflection of my self-worth, that I was not guilty, and that I had the power to say no, and move on. Over time, I began to free myself from the burden of guilt, shame and anger, which did not belong to me.

My healing process was not linear. There were days when the weight of the past threatened to overwhelm me, when nightmares took me back to previous horrors. However, each setback renewed my determination. I was able to transform my pain into hope for my desire to live an authentic and fulfilling life.



One of the most powerful moments in my healing was discovering forgiveness and tolerance for myself. I understood that I was not guilty of this experience that I never wanted. I learned to free myself from all forms of self-bitterness, and to appreciate the sweet and tender person I am. I learned to stand on my own two feet physically and emotionally, and realized that I was much stronger than I had ever imagined. Every action was an affirmation of my newfound independence, a bold declaration that I would never again be a victim.

Today, I want to be a voice of encouragement, living proof that life after violence is possible. By sharing my story, I want to sow seeds of hope in the hearts of those who are still fighting in silence.

My story today embodies the human ability to rise from the darkest ashes and shine with new light; I've transformed my pain into a source of inspiration for myself and those around me.

SAAS



It took time to decide which experience I wanted to write about, and then it hit me. “Which?” All too many women can understand: there isn’t just one. I could have written about how one ex left me with gruesome images in my head that often played on repeat, or another who towered over me and cornered me in my college dorm, saying no one would believe me if I spoke out about his abuses, even telling me to die on the operating table the night before my hysterectomy (among many other horrendous things). There were men who used me as a sexual experiment and stripped me of my dignity; an ex who took photos of me at my most vulnerable without my consent; a man who sexually assaulted me on the first date; a man whom I recently had to warn that I would get the police involved if he didn’t stop contacting me; and a male friend who told me I would fail on my own and have to move back into my parents’ house after I left Sudbury... I could have chosen to tell any of these stories, and reawaken my old, victimized self. But instead, I will lay her to rest in peace, and do her justice by highlighting my ongoing successes.

Today, I’m 28, and after 1.5 years of trying to enter the field, I am finally starting my dream career. I recently received my driver’s licence and bought my first car, have my own apartment, have been reconnecting with my Métis roots and finding my spiritual and fitness communities. There is also a special man in my life. It has been a major learning curve to deprogram myself from expecting abuse, but he has been patient. For a man who often must be tough, detached, and have a thick skin for his job, when he is with me, he is gentle and affectionate, never so much as even raising his voice. I remembered that I am worthy of the better life I had moved to another city for, and decided that how men of the past treated me will have no power in dictating my outcome.

While I enjoy being held by the special man in my life, I also know now that I am able to hold myself up alone if I must.

AC



How can we find value in our suffering?

We ask God to change us from the “victim spirit” to become a “responsible spirit”.

While the dictionary has several definitions for “responsible”, I give three:

1. A reasonable person
2. A person who makes good decisions
3. A person who is aware of their actions or those of others.

So even if we have suffered at the hands of another, we must use our intellect, make the decision to be courageous, continue to live our lives, to move forward, and help other women who have also suffered awful things – that is how we’re all going to heal.

Since the beginning of time, so many women all around the world have suffered all kinds of violence at the hands of sick men.

Let’s help each other. Women’s solidarity is so very important.

*Mireille Sturgeon*



My last relationship was very toxic. He made me feel like everything I did was wrong. I would try my hardest to gain his acceptance, not knowing that this wasn't healthy. After about a year and a half, the relationship started to become more physical and dangerous. He pinned me against the wall, and head butted me several times. I tried to defend myself, and when I did, he punched me in the face a few times, making me bleed from the mouth.

That caused so much trauma. I had nightmares, and isolated myself from friends and loved ones. It took awhile to regain trust in anyone. I finally called the cops, and this case is still going through court, so that he will be held accountable for his actions that left me broken.

That said, by reaching out for therapy and counselling, I found myself getting better every day. It took months just to regain my control (my power). I still felt embarrassed, ashamed and alone, and blamed myself, thinking that I should have known better, and left him before the situation got that extreme.

Let me tell you, you didn't do anything wrong, and you are not alone. You have the strength within yourself to see that he is the one with the problem, not you. No one should use any type of force to hurt someone else. You are strong. You are loved. You always have someone to turn to for help... never feel bad for asking.

My journey is not an easy one. It takes time, and I'm still healing. You will have days when you just want to stay in bed, and cry and rest. It is emotionally draining. But take time for YOU! You are important, even before your children. They need you to be strong, and they need you to take care of yourself so that you can be there for them. That is the greatest gift you can give yourself.

I have picked up a new hobby – I started doing yoga, getting back into society, and feeling safe again. Sometimes, I still have those fears of bumping into him, but I have control over my emotions. He has no power over me, and he never will. Like I said before, you have to heal yourself from the inside, and no one can do that work other than you. You will regain your strength, I promise. I hope you will let go of all the anger, hatred and pain that it caused you. That's the only way to heal... holding on to that will only hurt you, not him.

The best revenge is for him to see you happy, to see that he didn't break you. My justice will come when he stands in court and admits to the judge that he's "guilty". The sentence doesn't matter. What's important, is that he be held accountable in some sense for what he did wrong.

*Tamie Killeen*



Human trafficking is too often portrayed through Hollywood lenses and the media, not by reality. My situation leans more to a “close call”. My younger self’s perception of human trafficking, prior to my experience, was naive. Being from a small town, basically living in a cozy bubble, I was privileged and viewed life through rose-coloured glasses. The media paints a trafficker as some mobster-type who would ring anyone’s “stranger danger” alarm, but I did not have that having come from such a tight-knit community.

Unfortunately, the reality is that a trafficker is often someone you know, and even trust at first. After my unfortunate experience of being lured, sexually harassed, and ganged up on during a trip to Cuba, I wish I could say that I was fine right away. Actually, for a few weeks afterwards, I felt fine (in retrospect, disassociated), but once the reality of what could have been hit me, I knew I had been lucky. However, realizing this brought me through a time of grief and dark depression, for the loss of the innocence I painted the world with.

It wasn’t long after allowing myself to feel my emotions that something inside me clicked. I didn’t have to continue to feel sorry for myself, and bury these emotions with unhealthy coping mechanisms. Someone once told me “You can choose another thought” and that truly changed my outlook. This is a key phrase when my brain starts to spiral. It’s funny how small interactions can really stick with you. So I leave you with this message: You can always choose another thought! Any therapist or psychologist will tell you that the stories we tell ourselves play a fundamental role in how we interact with the world around us. Well, I didn’t want my story to “be me” or to continue to affect my world, so I allowed myself to change my perspective and my focus.

I did a lot of healing and self-care, and grew a true passion for working with my own energy and the energy of my environment. The throat chakra is blue and rules our communication organs.

So with this opportunity to speak my truth, it just made sense to equip myself. In the spirit of not becoming my story, I embarked on a journey to help others to navigate their emotions following a traumatic life event of any kind. I started taking Reiki classes and learned so much about the body's energy centres, and the ways to help balance a person's energetic spaces. This propelled me to look even further for ways I could help.

After many twists and turns, I found my current job with Algoma Family Services, where I am the admin for the counselling programs, which allows me to continue to speak my truth. I am the first point of contact for clients seeking help. I'm very passionate about this work, and feel I can really help make a difference.

I believe my story is relevant to this book, and a true reflection of the importance of community services like Centre Victoria, Fem'aide and others. To combat human trafficking, we must begin by educating people, raising awareness, and training them to recognize the signs, and the earlier the better. With the proper education and the right messages at the right time, we can really make a change, and keep our communities safe. If little Myriam had participated in one of the youth presentations given by Centre Victoria or other agencies, she might have seen the red flags.

I take this moment of writing to say that I forgive myself because what happened to me was not my fault, and does NOT define me.

*Myriam*

**Co-editors**

Gaëtane Pharand  
Mireille Charlebois

**Contributor and translator**

Linda Levesque

**Printer**

OJ Graphix

*Published in December 2023*

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect  
those of the Government of Ontario.

