

Chronicles from Dis'Trick to Stroll

*Written by the Peers Sex Work Story Collective
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*Shirley
1/16/18*

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Introduction

Since January 2016, Peers Victoria Resources Society has been posting sex work stories to their website, as part of a national sex workers' rights campaign that aims to decriminalize and de-stigmatize sex work in Canada. While the decriminalization of sex work is an important step in reducing state-sanctioned violence against sex workers it will not address the multiple forms of violence that many sex workers experience completely.

Sex worker advocacy cannot be a "one size fits all" approach because sex workers, their needs, and their experiences are not all "one size."

The Peers Sex Work Story Collective formed in the Fall of 2016 as a collaboration between Peers and myself, a graduate student researcher in the Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria. The vision that I shared with Peers' staff, was to produce a collection of narratives written by Peers participants, in an effort to create more space for diverse voices to be heard, especially those of Indigenous peoples.

In this book you will find a multitude of themes. There are funny stories, tragic stories, resilient stories, and hopeful ones. Participants involved were asked to write a story or any sort of literary piece that they felt inspired to share. There were no rules, guidelines, or stipulations. Each one of these stories is unique, just as unique the person who produced it. There is no single narrative of sex work as everyone's experiences are different. Even the title of this book, "Chronicles from Dis'Trick to Stroll", does not wholly reflect the narratives and experiences of all authors as not all participants refer to sex work as "turning tricks" and many have never worked "the stroll."

Too often, the voices of sex workers go unheard in society in part due to the continued stigmatization of sex work. Stigma leads to silence. Inside this collection are stories from fifteen current and former sex workers who have decided not to be silent. Through writing their stories and sharing their voices, they are resisting and opposing stigma.

As Crystal writes, "I hope you readers enjoy this."

Looking Forward

I was young, eighteen, and living in Vancouver when I got into sex work. I started going to bars and would meet people there. They would offer to pay me to “model up”—to put on vests and chaps and things.

I was born in Prince George, then lived in Terrace, BC, and then I came to Vancouver Island when I was eight. I’m thirty-nine now and have spent most of my adult life around Victoria and Vancouver.

I found Peers Victoria a few years ago through AIDS Vancouver Island, and started coming to the drop-in, mostly for the food and the honorarium for courses at first.

I have been coming to Peers for probably five years now. I come here every day that the drop-in is available. There are only two or three other men here, but that’s okay. I like coming here.

I think that sex work should be decriminalized, but dealing with police has not been an issue for me personally. Every now and then the police are in the park trying to bust people for having sex, but that’s about it.

My goal is to be a chef. I need to work more in kitchens to build up my experience. There’s a culinary course in Ottawa I’d really like to take. I like to DJ, too – I really like music – but I don’t get much of a chance to do DJ work.

Sex work for me hasn’t been a negative experience. I don’t feel like a victim. I feel safe in the work. I’m still working, sometimes at Beacon Hill Park and sometimes other places. My buddy and I did a call online a while ago, for a doctor who offered us money to roll around and make out.

Housing was an issue for me for a year, but for six months now it has been good. I’m doing alright.

Joe Black

The Story of Josh & Trish

This is our story, the story of how we met. It happened in 2014.

Josh:

It started with a video hook up in the early afternoon, in the beginning of Spring of that year. I saw an ad on the internet and needed money. Due to the addictions I have, it was an enticing way to make a quick buck. I decided to go to an interview for the ad, which involved making porn for cash—amateur adult films. This was something that I had never done before.

I placed the call and I met with the employer. He started asking various questions before I met Trish. In the interview, he brought in the girl whom I going to be working with. That was the first time I set eyes on Trish and I knew that I was attracted to her right away. We talked and it became clear that my attraction to Trish was based on more than just looks. This is the kind of girl I had wanted all of my life. The funny thing is that when we first met and started working together, it was hard to stay professional because we flirted and got along so well—like kids in love.

Now, two years later we are inseparable and are conquering our addictions together to further our relationship. We hope to be together the rest of our lives.

Trish:

Well here is my part in this, I have been working in the sex industry since before I was eighteen years old and of legal age. The first time that I sold myself for money I was twelve years old. I had to make money for myself because I had nobody to support me. I had nobody because I was a ward of the court due to my grandfather dropping me off at social services. It was the saddest day of my life.

I was born in Kelowna but was given to my grandmother and shipped to Victoria when I was only days old.

After my grandma died when I was nine, I was given to my grandfather who later gave me up to the state. I was twelve then.

I was later adopted by a family. In my experience, adoption can provide even more love than one's biological parents, because they are people who have chosen to love and care for you—they really want you.

I was working on video shoots when I met Josh. I had never dated anyone in the industry before Josh, as a rule. Now we are together and are hoping to get married.

Even though there is a ten year age difference between us we get along so well and are supporting each other in trying to regain our sobriety.

We want to do more than just survive. We want to be able to live a good life, together.



Josh and Trish outside of Peers in March 2016.

Sammy's Hot Rod

My name is Sammy, and I have travelled all over the world—sex work is what enables me to do this.

I'm going to tell you a story of something that happened here in Victoria I want to tell a funny story because everyone needs more humour in their lives. As a sex worker, there are a lot of bad things that happen, a lot of bad stories to tell. I prefer to focus on the good though, things that can bring humour and joy into people's lives.

It started with my girlfriend Kimmy getting a call from a client that she had never met. Kimmy couldn't meet him because she had an appointment. Kimmy took my car to the appointment, and I took this hot, sexy man into Kimmy's bed!

Kimmy instructed me that she kept her condoms and the lube in the red box at the bottom of the bed. I grabbed for the lube and sprayed some on my hands before grabbing onto this nice handsome young man's cock and thoroughly massaging it in.

"Is this a warming lube?" he asked. "I don't think so.." I replied. In a panicked voice he exclaimed, "It's getting too warm ... it's really starting to burn!"

So I turned on the lights and grabbed the lube to read the ingredients to see if he was having some sort of allergic reaction. To my surprise it wasn't lube at all, it was bear spray!

I couldn't believe it. He ran naked into the bathroom where he proceeded to rinse his burning cock with water from the sink while standing on his tippy toes.

I couldn't call 911 because they would send the police. The next best option was 811, the nursing hotline.

"811... what's your medical emergency?" I told them, "I have a guy here with his dick stuck in the sink because it got bear sprayed by mistake ... what should I do?"

“Hold on..” she replied.

Another person gets on the line and I have to explain the story all over again trying not to laugh. Nobody knew what to do. It must have been a first, even for them.

Finally, they advised me to go to the pharmacy and ask the pharmacist for Gaviscon, a common antacid but I couldn’t go because Kimmy had my car. I called Kimmy and explained the situation to her, while Kimmy was on her way back the man took off on his motorcycle. He said that the cool air would do him good and maybe one day this would make a good campfire story.

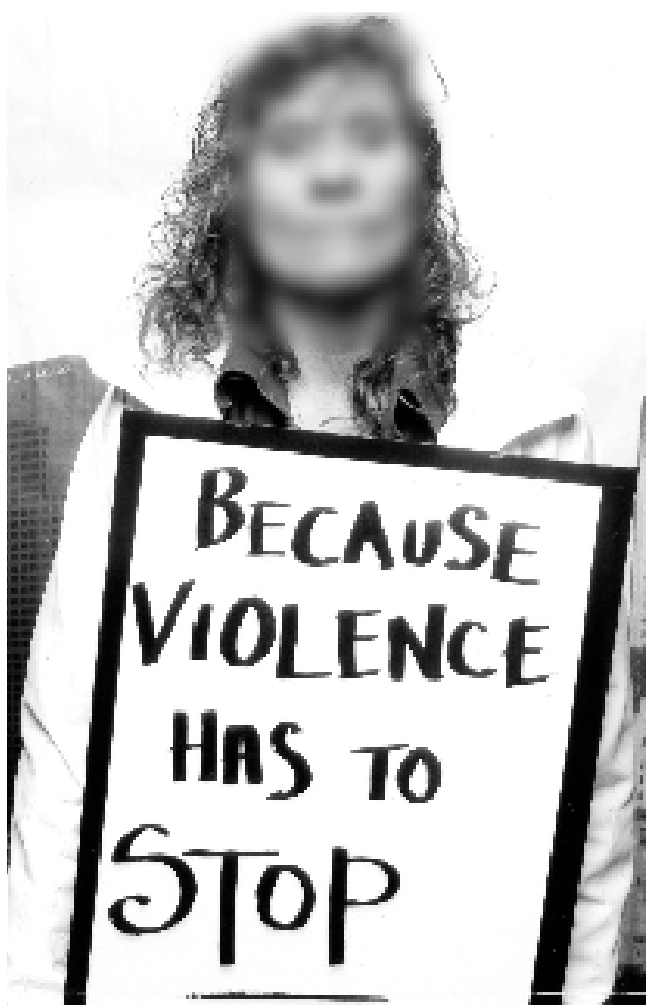
Talk about a hot rod! I am sure that I’m one experience he’ll never forget!

I was too embarrassed to talk to him again, so Kimmy called him the next day. He said he was fine, but he never contacted Kimmy or I again.

Sammy



Dreamcatchers made at an Indigenous craft-making workshop at Peers in December 2016.



An anonymous sex worker from Peers advocates against violence in her community.

The Bad Date

I was on the stroll and a guy came up to me and asked me for a date. He had a friend with him so I said “only one of you” and he said that was fine so we walked down the road. His friend was standing there and he had a phone in his hand. The one who wanted a date asked me for a blow job and said, “fourty dollars right?” I said yes and sat on a ledge there.

The next thing I knew, he punched me in the face and my nose started gushing with blood and they both ran off. I walked up the road bleeding severely. I went to a house near the stroll where I knew the person living there. He had seen us walking down the road, because he had just pulled up with some friends when we were going down the road. He came out and gave me a towel and put me in his car and we drove around but never saw them. He made sure I was okay and took me to where I was staying. It was a bad experience and it was the only one I had in ten years of working on the streets as a hooker.



Tammy F.

Artwork by Tammy F.

My Short Story

Here is a funny little story that I would like to share.

I was born and raised here in Victoria, BC. I have also lived in numerous areas across Canada. Now, at fifty-one years old I reside in Victoria. I have worked, doing different types of things, throughout my life. There was a time when I ran my own escort service. I worked the street as well.

I have spent a total of twenty-seven years, off and on, in the sex industry. While working as a sex worker I encountered many things—I will take you to the lighter side of my experiences. I hope you readers enjoy this.

Now, I can recall one gentleman that I would see every second Saturday. I would have to really psych myself up for this appointment and wind myself down with root beer schnapps and then more root beer schnapps. Anyhow, I cannot reveal this man's name or his occupation as discretion is important. To this day, I must keep this in play—discretion is important.

We will call him Joe. Every second Saturday of the month, Joe wanted three hours of my time and sex was not part of the deal. You see, Joe just wanted to be caught being naughty. Joe wanted to be caught and somewhat punished with a small spanking and some assertive verbal punishment.

Joe would always arrive to his appointment at 10 am sharp with his briefcase in one hand and his small black cloth bag in the other. He was dressed in a suit, always, was soft spoken and would shake nervously in a happy, excited sort of way. He reminded me of a horny little dog. You know, like when a dog's tail is wagging and they are peeing all over the place—that kind of excited.

Some ladies would think this job would be a piece of cake. Yet for me, it was completely exhausting. When I think about it now I have a chuckle. Joe wanted to be caught being naughty with his old, original “Raggedy Anne” doll. Our agreement was \$600 to be paid in cash, as it always was.

He would put my cash on the coffee table and excuse himself only to emerge from the bathroom with a diaper on and the Raggedy Anne doll suspended from his hand. He would walk around, occasionally crouching down, as if he was trying to hide while fondling his doll and letting me get small glimpses of him.

Joe would get pretty excited. Getting more and more excited, Joe would suggest that I spank his butt and privates. Then I would send him out of the room before finding him crouched down in the hall closet, or by the bed—in different areas of the house, until he became so excited... well, you know.

I laugh when I think about it. Joe was one of the fun ones I used to see.

Crystal Elliot



Artwork by Anonymous.

Homelessness and Me

Coming from a lower, upper class family I never thought that I would find myself in such a position as this.

Going through the final stages of divorce, depression had kicked in. That is when drugs became my best friend. You lose it all: your house, job, family and even some friends. This was devastating. I was whacked out on cocaine with no home to speak of—unless you count the underside of a picnic bench at the park. I was at my wit's end and suicide had become an option for me. While I was sleeping in the park, my “chateau”, a Priest from the church nearby saw me and brought over a hot meal and gave me a comfortable place to sleep. The next day Father “John” recommended a spiritual retreat run by nuns. The self help approach, it really saved my life.

Now I work. I have friends and my family is back in my life. I quit the drugs. Now my life is on a path, with exciting new things to offer and I am very hungry.

Anonymous



Photography by R. McKay.

Living a Nightmare

This is the story of how I became a prostitute.

My dad kicked me out in March of 1977. I went to two receiving homes. In one receiving house I was raped. From there I went to Fernwood House.

At Fernwood House I met a girl that took me to a party where I met two men: one of them was a pimp. They ignored the other girls while playing with and taking pictures of me. The first time he picked me up, he took me to the Village Green. There were three men there and I had to have sex with all of them. He never gave me any of the money. The next time he took me to his house and gave me alcohol. Then he took lots of pictures of me. After he wanted sex and I tried to fight him off but never succeeded.

Then the girl from the group home who had taken me to the party came into my room and tried to extort money from me in exchange for “protecting me” on the streets. When I said no she said, “then you’re dead.” I laughed and that is when she stabbed me.

The group home parent called the police. As soon as the police entered, that girl yelled out “Cindy is a juvenile prostitute!” The police talked to me all night. I told them everything and showed them all of the addresses.

In the end, the police and my social worker said that this man had over 400 photos of me and more that he had burnt in an incinerator in his basement. After that happened, I went to the street.

Cindy

The First Time

I was seventeen years old, a new mother. I had a boyfriend with no job and my niece had come over to my house to get ready for a “date.” She explained to me how glamorous this lifestyle was: the trips, the clothes, and the money!

So I thought, “well why not me?” I am somewhat attractive so one night I got all dressed up and went to my neighbours house to use his phone. He then propositioned me for oral sex. He told me that he had put girls through college and that because it was my first time, I could say no and he would still pay me. So I proceeded to lay on his bed and I remember taking off my pants and him taking out his dentures. He was an older gentleman, but I wasn’t physically attracted to him. He proceeded to give me oral sex.

I closed my eyes and felt so ashamed and said, “No! Please stop, I can’t.” He did stop and paid me \$500. I quickly pulled up my pants, thanked him for the money and went home. I showed my boyfriend the money when I got home and he said, “what the fuck, you actually did it?!”

The shame and guilt was strong but I felt like I had to do what I did for my child.

Anonymous

My Path to Peers

This is the story of the start and end of my life in the sex trade.

When I was twenty-one I had just left my partner who was very abusive towards me. I took my three year old and one year old and got a place to live. Soon after, my cousin got me into the sex trade.

I was working out of an agency on Burnside road. At first, I couldn't believe what I was doing but I made tons of money and I needed it as I was on welfare. At the same time I was going to Camosun College to get a career in nursing.

At this time, when I started working, my ex-partner who was a very abusive man eventually found out and he did some very scary and crazy things: he spray painted the word "hooker" all over my car. Then he broke into my home and carved up all the furniture that I had recently bought. To top it all off, he made me call my mother and tell her what I was doing. Even though we were broken up, I was still scared of him but eventually I got rid of him.

Then I got married when I was twenty-four years old. I was with my husband for seventeen years when it tragically ended. I was such an emotional wreck and was doing drugs to cope. So there I go again at thirty-nine years old, back to the sex trade. I worked for a telephone agency and advertised in Monday Magazine—I made good money.

After a few years, I stopped using drugs when I found Peers. I feel like Peers cares about me—that's part of how I cleaned up my life. Now, I have been in a relationship with a guy since 2012, although at times I think about getting a client or two to make extra money. The agency Peers has helped me so much over these past few years.

Sandi G.

Why Sex Work?

For the past nine years I have been on a personal mission to educate as many people as I possibly can about the work that I choose to do, namely high-end, indoor, independent sex work. In 2004, after a satisfying, gratifying and lucrative 14-year-long career as a Registered Massage Therapist, I sought to make a living from sex work.

There are so many reasons why I continue to choose sex work. Depending on the day, and my state of mind, those reasons may vary. I need money. I need sex. I want to know who exists in this hidden, secretive, forbidden territory. I am curious. I am angry. I am scared. I am lonely. I am frustrated with my lot in life, with my relationships, with myself. I want to touch people. I want to make a difference. I want women and girls, across the globe, to be honoured and respected and cared for. I want to earn what I am worth. I want to continue to use, and expand upon, my skills in bodywork. I am interested in human sexuality. I want to be intimate with another human being. I know that other human beings want to be intimate with me. I know that human beings have not only a desire, but also a need, for intimacy with other human beings. I have a high sex drive. I love orgasms. I love watching consensual adults have orgasms. I think that every consensual adult should experience the most satisfying orgasms that they can as frequently as they can.

In the spirit of encouraging and facilitating the possibility of consensual adults realizing their orgasmic potential, I am committed to manifesting my vision of the Academy of Sexual Health and Enjoyment (ASHE), a place of learning, teaching, research, health, pleasure, and wellness. This is the work of the doctoral dissertation that I am currently pursuing at the University of Victoria, in Victoria, BC.

I am a 51-year-old Métis woman, mother of two daughters, 29 and 19, big sister to two brothers, daughter to two living parents, and cousin and niece of many in a large extended family. I am the first in my immediate, and extended, family to pursue a doctoral degree.

My doctoral application from my Master's in Educational Psychology and Leadership into an Interdisciplinary PhD was accepted on October 31, 2014. After a full, abdominal hysterectomy, January 8, 2015, and a colon resection, July 9, 2015, I officially began my PhD course work in September 2015.

I began my post-secondary education in 2007, in the First Nations Community Studies Program at Camosun College, also in Victoria, BC. In 2009 I transferred to the University of Victoria to earn a Sociology Honours Undergraduate degree, with Distinction, in 2011. I began a Masters degree in Sociology that year and transferred to the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership in 2012. My doctoral dissertation combines Education, Sociology, Theatre, and Indigenous ontology and epistemology into both a written dissertation and a one-woman theatre monologue. My doctoral work explores journals that I wrote as I made my way into sex work and the devastating consequences that I lived through as members of my family and community reacted to my decision with fear and violence. This story, and its many threads of moral panic, stigma, punishments and, ultimately, triumph over the hurt and pain of the past, is braided into an eclectic mix of theorists' voices, initiating the conversation as to the value of the Academy of Sexual Health and Enjoyment.

There is not one human being that I have spoken to who is not interested in greater sexual health and enjoyment. I am interested in the cultural messages that are created and enacted with regard to human sexuality in cultures across the world. Atrocities are committed to humans and their bodies, particularly their sexual bodies. I want to know what is at the root of this behaviour, and how this issue might be addressed in a calm and respectful manner. Laws and regulations regarding the sex work industry change with political climates and social pressure and, yet, sex work, itself, and men and women like me, we continue on, quietly, every single day.

Lisa Ordell

October 31st 2016

Breathing Again

The mind finds solutions to survive and life throws you situational addictions too, with your journey towards these.

Reluctant to turn back, your tale begins. You box yourself in and push yourself up. You breathe and you go forward.

A memory comes forth from a passage in memory. You thought your own mother had morals but out of her mouth comes “From now on I’m taking all men for their money.”

And then those rough days arrived, days when your children are your only salvation in life and survival mode kicks in.

The help is not there and those words echo in your head: a memory that makes it alright to turn to a few men to survive. My time was short but my need for forgiveness for this period, this downward spiral, consumed me in my soul.

In my heart, I will always want “God” to forgive me for my sins and for my mistakes along my journey in this life.

Before my soul releases. Losing my gravitational being and being my own force. My soul yearning for forgiveness.

As we all one day, will journey.

I am a daughter, a mother, a grandmother, a survivor.

Anonymous



Painted by the author of "Breathing Again".

summer storm

leaving the room, the cold air's wet teeth bite at my skin
disturbing the sleepy fog that had settled there
the smoke from his cigarette chases its tail into the night
his words drip warm, and soft, and fluid
we watch as the clouds gather, whispering
tempting the wind,
invoking rain.

Kate

What's Left Unsaid

Sex work is not something that I do often but it is something that I have done. I have responded to ads online in the past, on occasion. Victoria is the most expensive place I have lived in Canada as far as living costs go.

The work that I have done though is very low risk, or at least I like to think it is. I know that there is still risk. Being an Aboriginal woman, there is always risk but I don't touch anyone and nobody touches me. This makes me feel safe or safer. Mostly, I have been paid to watch men or to have men watch me pleasure myself, if I am comfortable with that. I have made hundreds of dollars in mere minutes—it doesn't take some men long at all.

These are business men, travelling, with fancy hotel rooms. Maybe they have wives at home but I don't think about that. After all, they could be doing a lot worse than paying to jerk off in front of me.

Part of me finds this work exciting and empowering. Part of me finds it terrifying because of the things that I know can happen to sex workers, especially Indigenous sex workers, even in fancy hotel rooms. None of those things have ever happened to me with a client but I do this rarely as I have other ways of making money.

I'm educated and have a career. I don't rely on sex work to survive, and will likely never have to but I am committed to advocating for sex workers' rights and safety for those that do and for those like me.

Alice

Ricki's Story

I'm a sex worker transitioning out of the industry. Sex work happened to me by fluke 20 years ago, but it has come in handy. I was always working minimum-wage jobs, so sex work gave me additional income. It's not easy raising two kids on minimum wage.

I'm originally from Vancouver Island. A place that I feel like I've spent half my life trying to leave, and the rest trying to get back to. I've worked in the park and I've also worked in Vancouver. I would post on Craigslist what bathhouse I was going to be in, and make up to \$3,000 in a few hours. But I couldn't hustle straight and the money never lasted long. I got to a point where I was homeless and couch-surfing.

I've been an active client of Peers for a number of years but when I first connected with them it was through their Men@Peers program. In those days, it was sandwiches, lube and condoms provided by outreach staff down at Beacon Hill Park. At that point I found myself in a spot where I wasn't comfortable, and was really second-guessing myself. I was very close to rock-bottom. During that time in my life, it had been becoming even easier for me to get high for the hustle, so it didn't take long for me to feel worse and worse about myself. Some of my family members had really grave concerns, because they'd witnessed the change in my demeanor. It all happened in about nine months. Everyone was aware that I wasn't looking or acting the same. I'd always been happy-go-lucky, and "party and play" had worked for me. But things were different.

There was this time about six or seven years ago, when I was involved in after-hours scene, when I ended up on life support for four and a half days. I woke up on the sixth day and was so surprised to see my mom there. But then I went right back out working. I think what really made me want to get out of the hustle was a bad date. I had a bad mental health breakdown as a result. When the most severe bad date you can imagine happens, it definitely gets you thinking, "Damn, boy, you've got to get out." When you can't control who, when, or where... "you're in trouble." It is a sentiment I continue to echo to myself. After that bad date happened, I knew I didn't want to be in either of those two dark places ever again.

After I had the breakdown my sister had the option of having me sectioned (under the Mental Health Act), but she didn't want to, so she called Peers. And that created a series of stepping stones. Peers was really helpful in getting me set up with counselling, outpatient services, and housing. I come to Peers virtually every day now.

These days, I'm not attempting to stop hustling, but I have gone some months without it. I have established housing now, and Peers was very instrumental in that. They've suggested that I enroll in an addiction education program given the stage of addiction I was at, I thought it would be useful for me. Through that program I learned that not everybody's bottom is the same. Through the program I was able to learn and think without judgment. It gave me insights into my own life.

Right now, it's been nine months without intravenous drug use. There are longer and longer periods between my usage. I've gained a lot of confidence through Peers recognizing my success, through getting housing, and reconnecting with my family. I had closed a lot of people off.

Last fall, I participated in another training program with Peers, on health and wellness. That was the thing that gave me the idea that the longer I stay away from my own using, the lower my risk is for blood-borne infections. It created a snowball effect in me to want to learn more. Being armed with that knowledge keeps me safe and healthy. Keeping healthy is now at the forefront of my mind. I'm approaching my mid-40s, and it's clear to me that I don't want to be here when I'm 60. That's not a judgment—just an observation.

For the first year and a bit at Peers, I think I was the only male who walked through the doors. I've seen half a dozen come through since then. Being engaged with Peers over the last few years has heightened my sex-positive identity. I would never have identified as a sex worker five years ago—my hustle was my deepest darkest secret. The lies I made up! You tell so many of them.

There's a lot of resentment and anger among those who know me when they gain the knowledge of who I really am. But it's not someone else's story to tell until I'm ready to share it. Now, there's an intimate circle of friends and family who know my story. I've even become more comfortable at having my family drop me off at Peers instead of a couple blocks away so they wouldn't know where I was going.

My kids are at an age now that if I ever had to explain to them this whole double life of mine, it would be done in a supportive atmosphere. I've learned you don't have to pick up every piece, and that not all of it belongs to me. I'm happy I can share my story, which is not just my story but shared with the agency that helped me with the resourcefulness, with the tools, to get to a different place.

Ricki



Photography by T. Levitt.

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Chii-Miigwetch (thank-you so much).

Rachelle McKay



Artwork by Sammy.



This book was written by current and former sex workers on Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territories in Victoria, BC.

