

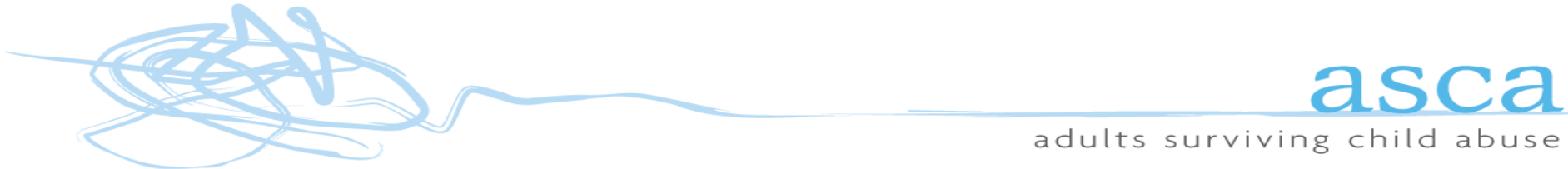
**A journey from childhood trauma – a  
*personal account***

***Grampians regional mental health  
conference 2013***

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**[www.asca.org.au](http://www.asca.org.au)**



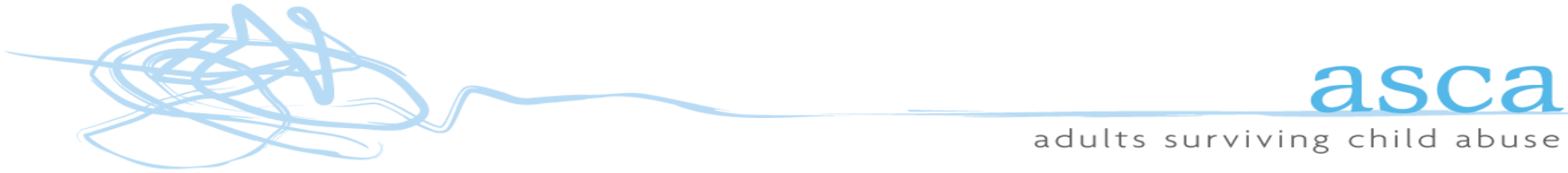
# Superwoman or *not*?

- Successful GP
- Mother of 4 and foster child
- Invincible; Goal-oriented
- Intolerant; Emotionally detached; Mocking; Judgmental

# Trauma emerges

Trigger – sudden death of niece

- Grief not resolving
- Overwhelmed
- Losing control
- Not coping



# Starting therapy

- Establish boundaries
- Alien environment - Uncomfortable
- Having to speak about myself
- Starting the ball rolling
- Embarrassed silences

# Memory loss

- Aware of lousy memory but dismissed it
- No memory for ten years of my childhood
- Agitated
- Significance of amnesia not highlighted - Deficit now troubled me

***“But I did have a happy childhood, my mother told me so”***

# Therapy – first months

- Safety
- Trust
- Boundaries
- Attachment - Maternal thinking mind
- Resented dependency
- More anxious; Panic attacks; Depression
- Tested her availability



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# Flashbacks

- Terror; fear, horror
- Confusion
- Losing my mind
- Shame

*Worsening depression/suicidal thoughts and gestures -  
Therapist's availability crucial*



# Past subsumed present

- Past subsumed the present - living in memories
- Daily life faded into background - Unable to function
- Worsening depression

*Needed repeated grounding and connection*

*Once competent adult self and traumatised child parts*



# Therapist availability

## Clear but broader boundaries

- Patient; Empathic
- Validating; Available
- Reliable; Predictable

# Isolated

- Withdrew; Felt abandoned
- Childhood space; Alone
- Suicidal; Depressed isolation; Disconnected

***Needed constant grounding and connection***

# Depression

- Worsening depression; Acutely suicidal; Antidepressants
- Secretive; End the pain
- ? Hospitalise; Contract – no harm

# Trust

- Consistent caring; Growing trust
- Could keep her presence in mind; Growing safety

*Walk alongside me; Bearing witness*

# Dissociation

- Since childhood
- Keep trauma compartmentalised - Prevent psyche from being overwhelmed
- Out of body experiences – Depersonalisation; derealisation
- Disarticulated fragments without context or chronology

*Needed to bring me back to present so trauma could be explored*

# Personalities

- Disavowed child parts
- Fragments ; Personalities
- Holding single experience - No awareness of one another; Complete separation of parts
- Held trauma; Protected the psyche

***Children's voice, child's language, concepts***



# Engage with parts

- Safety & Trust
- Bad and dirty parts
- Resentments, fear, aversion
- Shame – get rid of shameful parts
- Accept, embrace and integrate

***Turbulent “we” became peaceful resolving “me”***



# Accepting “Growly”

- Internal battle to accept Growly
- Absorbing pain and guilt
- Had externalised negative feelings and behaviour
- Reclaimed parts of myself
- Sense of self

# Process

- Nothing suggested
- Open and receptive
- Patient sets the pace of therapy
- Challenged some of my thinking
- Patience

# Shame

- Shame an obstacle - Self blame
- Worthless & Bad
- Ingrained internalised messages
- Self-hatred; Self-destructive

# Complex history

- Obsessive nature
- Revisited history - Different angles
- Accept would never know some aspects

***Trauma has become a part of my history. It no longer permeates my days or dominates my existence***

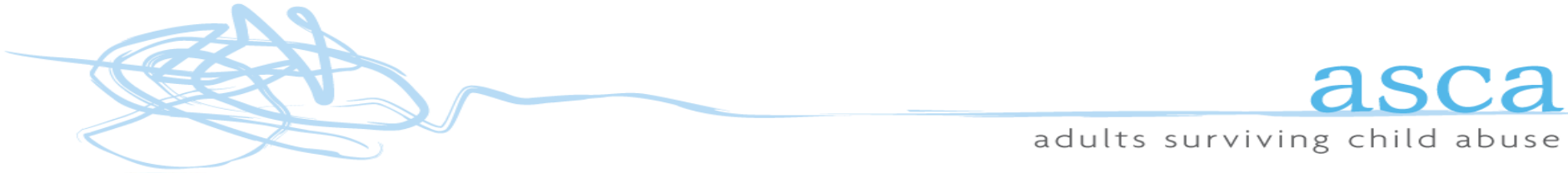
# Feelings - thoughts

- Feelings invalidated ;Experiences denied
- People pleaser; Defer to others
- *Model kindness and compassion*
- *Value self*
- *Acknowledge strengths*



# Finding a voice

- Talking and being heard in therapy
- Writing as a purge ;Weaving a narrative; Publishing a book; Reading
- Advocacy
- Speaking socially then in public



# Relationships

- In therapy
- With myself
- Family
- Friends
- At peace with my history
- Greater empathy, patience, tolerance



# Vulnerability/dependence

- Acknowledging vulnerability is a *strength*
- Vulnerability enabled me to engage in and stay in therapy
- Vulnerable enough for dissociated parts to emerge
- Needed to be *dependent to be vulnerable*
- Dependency necessary for my survival
- Reaching out in need is *courageous*



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# Family

- More open
- Shared journey
- Permission to seek help
- Value in connections
- Compassion
- Being there

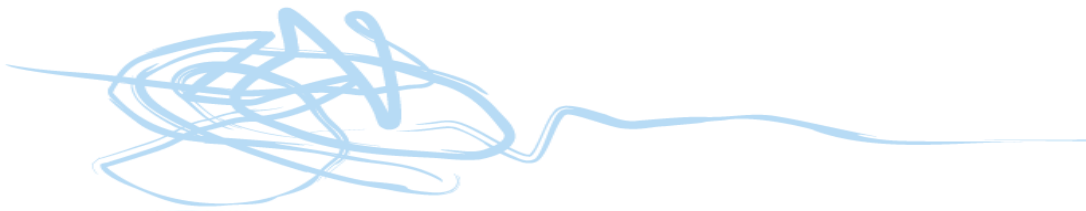


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creating new possibilities

# Friends

- Deeper friendships
- Not scared by intimacy in relationships
- More open and better connected
- More insightful
- Capacity to reflect
- More confident socially



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# Therapy

- Reflective capacity
- Collaboration
- Maternal object
- More in touch with feelings, thoughts, beliefs
- Able to make choices
- Look to future
- Self-realisation

# Therapeutic process

- Informed
- Committed
- Long-term
- No one modality
- Waiting game

***Relationship the key***

***Now holder of experiences rather than unconscious  
subject of them***

# Therapeutic elements

- Safety
- Trust
- Dependency
- Relationship
- Reflect on and process material and feelings
- Therapist – Insightful, skilled, compassionate, unconditional regard, empathic



# My therapy

She walked alongside me every step of the way guiding me from **confusion and terror**, through **chaos**, onto **stability and understanding**. Without her, my family and a few close friends, I would not have survived. And I have not only survived but have been able to **move past mere survival** to learn how to **live well**.



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For more information go to [www.asca.org.au](http://www.asca.org.au)

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