

Project: **'Reflections of trauma, challenges, and**

**healing: An oral history'**

Respondent: Clare Littlejohn

Year of Birth: 1979

Age: \*\*

Connection to project: Respondent

Date of Interview: 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2022

Interviewer: Indira Pole

Recording Agreement: Yes

Information & Consent: Yes

Photographic Images: No

Length of Interview: 27 minutes and 27 seconds

Location of Interview: Kirkintilloch

Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics)



Time (from: mins/secs)	Description	Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs)
0.24	Interviewer asks the respondent her year of birth, where she was born and brought up and where she lives now.	
0.38	Respondent replies that she was born in Glasgow in 1979. She states that she grew up in Lenzie and now lives in Kirkintilloch.	
0.52	Interviewer asks the respondent for any memories of her childhood	
0.53	Respondent replies that her parents were very hands on and around for things. She has a younger brother.	
1.44	Interviewer asks the respondent if she would describe her childhood as a happy one.	
1.49	Respondent replies that she has many happy memories of growing up and doing lots of activities with her family.	
2.14	Interviewer asks the respondent if she had lots of friends at this time.	
	"At school... I never really felt like I had real friends at secondary school. Bullied in first year. Second year-don't really remember much. Third and fourth I studied. I got my grades. And I just wanted out of school because of the peer environment. I wasn't very happy."	2.15-2.46
2.47	Interviewer asks the respondent if she would say any of these events traumatised her.	
	"I wouldn't say traumatised. I think I was...I think first year was the hardest. Because, obviously, it's adapting. Hormones, new groups of people. A girl that I knew from primary school told a lot of personal information to people that I didn't know. Which they found funny. About my adoption. About my upbringing. About my brother not being biologically related. That kind of thing. Was teased a lot in first year. Cause they thought it was funny and different. There was. So...School really wasn't a happy place."	2.52-3.33
3.35	Interviewer asks the respondent if it was all plain sailing when she moved on to adult life.	
	"I've always worked. I went from working in a shop to putting myself through college. Skill seekers first then college course then moved on to an HND. HNC, sorry, Higher National Certificate. So, I did that and felt that I was in a better place to learn in a more adult environment. Working...Domestic life maybe not such a bliss. I've always had terrible taste in men (laughs). Boyfriends...Disaster after disaster. A violent	3.45-6.08

	<p>relationship was also in there. So, it wasn't very good with the boyfriends. At the age of twenty four I decided to take the reins on my own life and I had no boyfriends for two years. And decided that I needed to decide who I was. I'd never been on my own. I'd never lived on my own. I got my own place. Was independent. Discovered a lot about myself. I was in a high powered job. I decided that I had reached the peak of my career. Well, as far as I wanted to go with being a manager in a call centre. I had lots of money. My own car. My own place. But I was socially unfulfilled. Whereas in that kind of environment and job you surrounded by people. You have got the high life. You're flying up and down the country. London, Leeds, excursions. Balls, trips to Switzerland with the work. You know, the company's throwing money at these big events. But really not anyone you would talk to outside of work. So, I took redundancy through another merger. And decided to concentrate on me as a person. Rather than as a career or a girlfriend. I did a bit of soul searching I suppose."</p>	
6.09	Interviewer asks the respondent when life took a turn.	
	<p>"So, that would have been age of twenty four, twenty six. I met a boy online. And married him. We now have three children. We settled. We got married. We have a family home. Children to raise. I found a friend in him as well so we were a team. We were there for each other when others weren't. Found some new friends through other people with children of the same age as my children. So, more, what I would call, appropriate friendships. Rather than shallow friendships. So, real people that could support and understand the stage in my life. So, I was working part-time jobs to raise children. My husband was doing the same. We were sharing the responsibility of the three children because they were quite close in age. Three under four years of age. So, it was too much for one person. So, we both needed a couple of days off each. So, we shared the work/life balance. And our middle child has some additional support needs, so it became harder to maintain work and appointments for both of us with the other two as well. So, I took an even smaller job, I suppose, with the local shop, when the youngest went to school. So that I was within walking distance of school and home and able to be around for the boys. It was during this job at the shop that an incident happened where I would say the trauma started. There was an incident where some young teenagers decided to come into the shop at night looking for trouble, alcohol or just violence in general. They attacked a customer who just happened to be leaving the shop. Who I would always maintain to this day saved my life that night. Because he stood up to them. And I was able to call for help. But he was severely injured. Kicked in the head. Stood on the head, which then resulted in panic attacks and anxiety. It's not something I've been around in my life. It's not something I've ever witnessed before. So, it kind of spiralled from there."</p>	6.19-9.30
9.33	Interviewer asks the respondent what age she was at the time of the trauma.	
9.36	Respondent replies that she would have been thirty six.	
9.42	Interviewer asks the respondent if she would say that this incident significantly impacted on her life.	
	<p>"Very significantly. It affected my ability to be a mother. To be able to leave the house. To be able to function. To the extent where I considered not being in this world. Because things were so traumatic I couldn't process what had happened and didn't see a way to ever come out of this dark place that I'd found myself in."</p>	9.53-10.27

10.29	Interviewer asks the respondent if the trauma affected her relationship with her own people.	
	"Yes, my children were just told that mum was tired and mum didn't have the energy. Or, mum needed to sleep. You know, I wasn't able to function with them some days. My husband had to take time off work. Family had to be with us more to support the children."	10.35-10.59
11.01	Interviewer asks the respondent how she found support if any.	
	"The doctor put me on some heavy medication which meant that I really didn't know what day it was most of the time. So, functioning wasn't really that possible. A lot of medication seems like the solution. But it really wasn't for me. Medication only stopped me feeling it. It kind of numbed... Zombie kind of...So, it wasn't really helping at all. I attended an event locally. By chance I had found out that there was a housing association open day a couple of streets away from where we stayed. And I had taken the children up to see the park and the entertainment that was on that day. And I came across a GRACE stall at the event. So, I spoke with someone who handed me a leaflet. I actually don't remember who it was. I just remember being really nervous asking about recovery. Because I had been self-medicating with alcohol as well as the medication. So, I wasn't really sure if I was needing a recovery charity or a group. Or, really where I fitted in all of that. I knew I wasn't an alcoholic but there was potential if I continued on the path I was on. So, knowing where you fit is a really difficult and really scary prospect. Cause you have to label yourself. You have to find out what you want to be called. Are you recovering? Are you an alcoholic? Are you a depressive? Trauma doesn't really have a charity of its own or a group of its own. There isn't a support group for trauma. It's which trauma. So you have to figure that out before you can even ask anybody. The person I did speak to that day said to me-'Come along. If it's for you it's for you. If it's not. It's not. You've got to try.' So, the leaflet sat, I must admit, in my house (laughs) for a little bit longer than it probably should have. Before I eventually went to the community centre. One day I was at the stage of-What have I got to lose? I'm getting nowhere on my own. I didn't know what else to do. The kids go to school. My husband went to work. And I just felt isolated, alone. Scared to be alone with the anxiety and panic attacks. But also terrified of telling anybody how I was feeling. So, walking into the community centre...I wasn't sure I would manage it. By chance somebody met me at the door and said-'Are you looking for GRACE?' And I said, yes and they walked in with me and made me a cup of tea. And I sat down. And I didn't say anything. I remember the first day just being quiet. Observing. I know it's hard to believe I was quiet. But I was. I was nervous. I was scared. I was unsure. Everybody knew each other and was this a place that I should be or not. So, I survived the first day. And I went back. And we took it from there. Just kept turning up. Kept seeing how it could help. And it wasn't not helping, and now it has helped enormously."	11.07-15.30
15.31	Interviewer asks the respondent where she is now with the trauma.	
	"Through a lot of the courses and projects and courses and self-help and services offered through GRACE- I've done a year of SMART training. I have done some CBT work. I've done some awareness. I've done some facilitating. I was encouraged to take my own personal skills to show others... To share in some arts and crafts. Through discussions people	15.41-17.46

	found out about my work history (laughs) which then opened up a can of worms to the fact that I'm an administrator. Quite highly skilled with Excel, office work. Through many years of work I had skills that were lying unused. So, trauma meant that I wasn't ready for the work place. So they say that you come to a point in GRACE where sometimes you move on entirely to another job or another service. But this is still my safe place. So, to go in to the big bad world as an employee. Trauma is not always understood. Plus it would mean maybe days off sick or going on to some sort of employment warning plan. So, to be able to adjust with my trauma, GRACE has supported me to be able to work flexibly and to be able to use my skills but within the boundaries that I can manage. And within the environment that accepts me with my broken pieces. So, that I maintain what I would call my recovery."	
17.47	Interviewer asks the respondent if she considers herself to still be on the journey of recovery.	
	"I think you're always on the journey of recovery. I don't think anybody's ever recovered. And to say that you are recovered I think can be not very open minded about what you're processing daily. Anything can trigger you. Anything can bring it back. I can still get jumpy around unknown circumstances or situations. I now have a process that I would go through to figure out if I would attend an event for instance. To make sure I had safe travel, safe people round about me. Safe escape plan. Whereas before you would go into a situation and just take it as it would maybe go. The trauma has meant that I have to be realistic with my own expectations. It's never going to leave me. It's part of who I am now. But, I'm functioning and I'm very happy with the fact that I function. And quite pleased with myself on some days when you think of what you have come through. But, at the same time, it doesn't define me. I'm not allowing it to define me is maybe the term. It's part of me."	17.53-19.17
19.21	Interviewer asks the respondent if she feels she is a different person than she was as a teenager.	
19.26	Respondent replies that she is in terms of life experience, friends and valuing time and empathy.	
20.26	Interviewer asks the respondent if she would say that she still needs GRACE.	
	"Yes, always. I don't think I'm ready to part with GRACE because I know how much it has helped me to the stage that I'm at today. I'm probably one of GRACE's longest member volunteers at the moment. I think I'm maybe reaching six years with the group. But we are members first, volunteers second. I have days were I need to attend a GRACE class or GRACE project. I attended an art project recently. I participated like everybody else did without my volunteer hat on. I think self-care is still very important. If you were to volunteer all the time it would be like working. The work/life balance would not be there. You've got to remember to take days for yourself and days for your family to maintain your recovery."	20.32-21.34
21.36	Interviewer asks the respondent if self-care was missing during trauma.	
	"There was no self-care because it was chaos. Absolute chaos. There was no...There was no way to process what had happened. It was so alien to my life that I couldn't process it at all. So, yeah, total chaos. "	21.49-22.10
22.11	Interviewer asks the respondent if she felt she had lost control during the trauma.	
	"I just wanted it to go away anyway that I could. The doctor's solution was to give me very strong medication which made meant that I wasn't feeling or being awake. Stuff to help me sleep. But it didn't actually solve	22.25-24.47

	<p>anything. I was on a twelve month waiting list to see a counsellor. I had contacted another two charities locally who put me on waiting lists to be seen. This doctor sent me someone out to the house and they said that they would put me on a list and I never heard back from them to this day. Lots of different charities had expressed that they had a service but I couldn't access it. The Richmond Fellowship took me to a couple of classes that they were running. But the classes were not suitable based on the fact that there was no support at the class. It was more of an activity. So there was no time during the activity to reflect. And I took two panic attacks during the outings that I then had to stop attending. I did eventually get a CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) after attending some counselling with the doctor. But it wasn't quite the twelve months. It was about ten months before I seen somebody for three appointments. And the three appointments was all they gave me to assess if I needed assistance or further support. And really only because I had young children in the house there was a concern...That they pushed for a CPN for me because I expressed that I really did worry for their welfare while I wasn't well. So, I did get a CPN but she visited very infrequently and the support really was just a conversation. So, it never really changed anything."</p>	
24.49	Interviewer asks the respondent what her hopes for the future are.	
	<p>"I am hopeful. I am a lot stronger than I have been. I can talk about the things that have happened without the raw emotion. The emotion's still there. It still makes me, you know, feel what happened when I think about it. But I can move forward from that. So, GRACE has taught me these skills to be able to compartmentalise. I did some rewind therapy. To be able to talk about something you have to break it down into factual information. So, moving forward. I would say GRACE will always be part of me and what I want to give back. Volunteering with GRACE, even if it's on a few hours a week or a month. Even if it was to become second to another job or challenge in my life. I would still always want to give something."</p>	24.54-26.03
26.05	Interviewer asks the respondent if she feels GRACE has something different to offer from all the other support she received.	
	<p>"A lot of the other organisations had people in employed positions that had never experienced anything like what I had been through. Couldn't imagine anything about trauma because they maybe had not had the misfortune of having a traumatic experience in their own lives. They either were reading it, googling it or referring to a booklet. There is no way to learn about trauma. You've got to experience it. And regardless of what trauma...I think that's the most important thing. Each trauma is different but the elements are the same. Where you experience trauma you experience despair possibly next. I'm not quite sure of the order but then you would go into a recovery and then a support capacity where you're able to explain your journey to others. To hopefully give them some hope of their own journey."</p>	26.19-27.23
	Interviewer thanks the respondent for her contribution to the project.	



