



Hi my name is Perdi, I am a 32 year old person. [I say person because I don't know who I really am - I have the body of a disfigured woman and the mind of a dead soul.]

Self-harming for me is a physical manifestation of the extreme internal distress and trauma I feel each day of my life. The feelings of guilt, shame and self-hatred for what I allowed to happen in the past. It is my punishment, yet release from this intense inner pain.

Unfortunately I still torture myself with the horrific injuries I do to myself each day, so although I am an active self-harmer, I still see myself as a survivor, of many things but especially suicide.

I am a survivor because if I truly acted upon the desperate emotional pain and trauma I feel within [the self-hatred, guilt and anger I feel within myself] for not being able to take control of the past, present or future to change my life, I would kill myself. It may seem a total contradiction but I do not want to die! I pray that I will recover one day, just like people who get caught early with cancer. I am still young and while I am still alive there is hope! How can I expect anyone to ever be able to understand me, let alone be able to actively help me? How can I ever trust anyone again?

I was 10 when I partook in my first attempt to self-harm. A deep scratch to my thigh was I thought all the pain I could take, but it didn't hurt compared to how much I hurt inside. It had been a regular occurrence for my father to help himself to my bodily orifices from a very young age for me, as long as I could remember and that was young. The man who I trusted over anyone else, my knight in shining armour, he hurt me but was always sorry - I was his blue eyed, golden girl, and his little princess - how could he ever mean to hurt me? Could he really kill my kitty and make me eat her? Something I didn't ever want to find out!

So, what triggered my first attempt at self-harm I think was the fact that suddenly I was realizing with age that maybe what we did wasn't 'normal' and maybe wrong. The older I got the deeper the physical wounds became and the deeper the internal trauma. I learned very quickly to dissociate from what was happening to me, and patch myself up after I had brought myself back from hell. Most surgeons would be proud of my stitch work and most quilters would see it as a work of art!

I felt powerless and much too scared to try and stop it; Mum was a drunk and

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didn't care so long as father kept feeding her the grog. She never heard the crying, screams and begging for him to stop and the fearful whimpering that went on for often hours. The physical pain of cutting up or burning myself was nothing compared to the sheer hopelessness and feeling that my soul was dead.

I was ashamed of, and hated my body for what he did to it. Self-harming was a way of controlling the situation and punishing myself for what I allowed to happen and he always said how much I enjoyed it - I can't remember if I did or not - I do remember feeling sick with guilt and seeing the flowing blood bring me back to life - well, life as I knew it!

The affects of self-harming actions on me are physical deformation which is extremely ugly and there's no plastic surgeon in the world that would ever be able to take the scars away. Much uglier are the flashbacks, the night and day mares that haunt me, the fear of everyone and everything around me. The absolute and sheer terror that he will return from his grave and that he still lives out there somewhere lurking in the shadows of my life! It was also an act of defiance, an assertion of the right to do as I pleased with my body.

Self-harming was a way of punishing my father too - those soft and subtle breasts and silken soft thighs soon became less soft after many a slashing, in fact, they became extremely deformed and very ugly and still are. Long sleeves, high necks, trousers and substantial material are the order of every day for me, so as not to disclose my long kept secret. The physical ugliness that, for short intervals, I can façade with merriment and 'normality'! Oh and definitely NO mirrors!

Well, I didn't have any family; Mum was an only child as was Father and so was I [Thank goodness]. I wasn't allowed friends and most kids at school were afraid of me because they thought I was weird and so was my family. Through their eyes, they were probably right! I have talked to very few people because if you do they think you have two heads and belong in a zoo. They suddenly start keeping their



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distance afraid of what to or not to say.

It is very hard to find a partner or someone to love such a pathetic excuse of a human being. Most people simply just don't understand and can't get their heads around the concept. Then there's the sympathizer who just basically feels sorry for you and it's not pity I want, it's understanding and help to try and stop these physically demeaning and destructive behaviours. I frighten most counselors away if I ever get to see the same one for long enough - some feel they have a magic wand that will heal everything once you fully spill the beans! Except all it does is open a can of worms that keeps oozing and oozing until they become totally consumed and asphyxiated by them and can't cope anymore. The Beatles put counseling in a nutshell for me "I don't know why you say goodbye, I say Hello!" But my Hello is too late and it's back to scratch, well slashing anyway!

The nearest thing to real assistance is the woman I am writing this for as she gives me - unconditional acceptance of what I do to myself and of me as a special person, is an excellent listener who hears, offers honesty, practical coping strategies, mutual respect and belief in the fact that there is hope and that I can do things to slowly improve and take control of my life. My life has been made better for knowing this woman through harm reduction techniques, long talks to gradually uncover and resolve the roots of my internal distress, selfsoothing techniques [something that was extremely alien to me] and someone who is trying very hard to understand this woman behind the scars - me! Annie walks with you, at your side, at your pace, and works with you when you are ready to confront the demons.

I haven't overcome my self-abusive behaviours yet. However, I have reduced the frequency and intensity of my self-harming. I don't burn myself anymore though. Annie does work with me in her own time and I so appreciate her commitment of time, honesty and her passion is real contagious! But if I could get into a SAFE Program where I could get some intensive treatment, I know I could give my all to try and overcome this consumption of my life.



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Ways I have learned to help myself are by; trying to vent my anger or frustration to relieve the internal tension I am feeling through other means than harming myself. I have a soft pillow that gets bashed at times or thrown around a bit. I sometimes manage a brisk walk if it's in the day. I have a small tape recorder that I verbalise my frustrations to.

I try to reach out to someone instead of the razor blades. I have a small support network now so I will either call them or ask them if I can visit or they can visit just until the ideation and urge to want to slash has gone. I have rang Lifeline too - but most still don't know what to say or patronize you and that can make things worse by increasing the level of anger or frustration. Have a couple of little angels there now if I can get them on duty!

I try some self-soothing by listening to happy music, cuddling Kitty [all my cats are Kitty - she got me through so much in my life and often kept me alive!], burn some oils, have a soak with lots of candles burning and relaxing music playing [often too hard to do on the deserve scale] read a book, watch a comedy.

I always have a texta in every room now, in a very obvious place and try to use that to draw on my body instead of cutting it. Doesn't always work but I would say I manage it about 3 - 5 times a day now, the rest are still cuts though! But they are not as harsh as they have been for so long.

I've tried to do the 'tell yourself in the mirror' shit, but it just don't work for me! The meditation is scary too as often it can bring on flashbacks that re-incarnate Father. So until I am able to feel better about myself and look in a mirror, let alone talk to it, and control the mediation experience, I think I will keep practicing what can or sometimes works for me. But Annie has made me realize that you do have to actively participate and practice to make the new behaviours part of your everyday life that will replace the old ones as second nature.

As to what advice I would give to someone else that really is a hard one. What may work for me may not work for someone else as we are all very different and



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unique. I would strongly suggest you try to seek help as soon as possible and a SAFE program is the specialist program for people who self-abuse, but we have to get a network of consumer programs up and happening soon.

It needs professional workers to be trained in the SAFE program and to lobby the government for \$'s for the programs because we, the self-harmers, are seen as attention seeking individuals suffering from Borderline Personality Disorders who need to pull their socks up or die at their own hands!

I know I'm definitely not the only one and it seems that self-harming is becoming the in thing for youngsters who are not coping with their lives or environments. There are even the Emo cults that use self-harming as a ritual type of practice - now that's frightening! Children and youth need somewhere to go where others understand, others who do what they do and want to stop - peer support and knowing you're not alone really does help.

I have not given my true name as I do not want your sympathy; this is a very brief encounter and miniscule snapshot of my life. I would like your empathy and the unconditional acceptance of individuals who live with such internally devastating and emotional pain each day. Pain that finds them torturing themselves physically to try and overcome it and survive another day.

Thank you for the opportunity to try and educate you in what self-harming is all about! From a 'real' perspective!

I am a survivor of self-harm.

I was one of the few lucky ones who got the opportunity to be part of the SAFE Central pilot program. I can honestly say that I have not self-harmed since finishing the program. It has now been 7 years and my life has changed so much. I moved away, got my first full-time job, met this amazing guy, a real honey that I am now married to and we have 2 beautiful children along with a menagerie of my dear animal friends. I still keep in touch with Annie from time to time just



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letting her know how effective the SAFE program was for me and my life.

I joined the program because I had been self-harming for many years since I was 11 years old. I wasn't fussy what I did to myself so long as the physical pain was greater than the hell I felt inside. I tried overdoses, slashing, hanging myself a couple of times, tried the hose on the exhaust pipe, would spill pots of boiling water on me arms and legs or the boiling kettle would slip out of my hand, my arms and legs were often the ashtray and my physical body quite grotesque from all the horrendous acts of destruction I did to myself.

I was receiving support from my GP and a counselor but I still self-harmed daily and often multiple times too. This resulted in regular and often daily emergency visits to the hospital that would patch me up and send me home to the same devastating loneliness and guilt ridden thoughts that were like a horror movie, playing over and over in my mind 24/7. You soon learned to leave your dignity at the door and just get the stitches or treatment with or without anesthetic. Definitely zero understanding! I knew that if I didn't do something soon, continuing these horrendous acts on me would result in damage that would be life threatening or permanent and death was a true reality to me. I have to state though that at no time did I ever want to die, death would have eventuated from accidental suicide, going just that bit to far! It's like drugs, the more you take, the more you need! The more you hurt inside and can't deal with it, the more you hurt and the more you have to hurt yourself physically to kill the sickening pain inside!

My then family, Mum, Dad, my brother and two sisters could not understand or deal with what I was doing to myself, so disowning me was the easiest way out for them. My few friends became more and more distant the harsher I became with my self-harming behaviours and my pets were the only ones who gave me any form of unconditional love or company.

So, why? Mum decided to have an affair with another man behind my Dad's back.



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Her boyfriend thought it would be good to have an affair with me too from the age of 7. He said if ever I told Mum or anyone he would kill my Mum and family. I was so frightened and scared but he would be so nice to me in front of Mum. Mum would drop me off there, even though I would almost beg her not to. She had no idea and didn't want to know. When I was 11 he bought me my first kitten. Flossy became my dear friend and my protector until the night I tried to run away. My punishment the next day, while Mum was shopping, was to watch while he held Flossy by the neck and slit her open from her throat to her poor little bum. I simply cannot put into words the revulsion I felt towards this man. I wished it was him and not Flossy.

About 3 months later he and Mum split up and he kept trying to get me to leave school with him for the afternoon. Then one afternoon the teacher caught us and stopped him taking me. When Mum came to the school she told me I couldn't say anything to anyone or Dad would leave us and I idolized my Dad. I tried to tell Mum but she just kept talking over me telling me I was being very silly and was more worried that I would say something to Dad.

By now I was past the scratching with the compass, pen and pencil points, I was using a knife I bought with my pocket money, a vegetable paring knife that had a pretty sharp end and it didn't take much to make the blood flow. It was such a relief and something I had total control of. I definitely didn't have any control over my life. I could let myself bleed until I felt the release and then with a small dressing and local pressure, I could make it stop as easy as I let it start!

Later, the burning and other nasty deeds I tried were partly done to punish myself as I definitely didn't have as much control as I did with cutting.

I sometimes feel that I could write a book, SAFE taught me how to use my journal as a self-soothing tool and I still keep my daily journal now. At times of high levels of stress or trauma, the ideation of wanting to pick up the knife can sometimes be quite overwhelming, but I turn to my SAFE bible and life toolbox



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that was given to me in the program.

One thing I must point out is that we need to learn lots of self-soothing first before we try and deal with the demons within. This way we are much better able to stay safe as we work through the program and delve deep into the unknown. It helps us to feel more in control of our recovery and lives. However, it is very hard for us to be kind to ourselves so it takes workers a hell of a lot of patience, understanding and sheer grit!

I was able to learn through the SAFE program the triggers that caused me to self-harm, why I self-harmed and safer alternatives to deal with my internal pain instead of hurting myself. I was there with a group of individuals who were there for the same reason which was a very supportive environment. We were all treated with dignity and found the hope; we really thought would never exist in our lives. Everyone's feelings, experiences and behaviours were treated with the utmost care and confidence. Peer support and education is a very powerful experience and tool in a person's recovery.

I no longer self-harm and I know of 5 others from the group, who too have amazing true stories to share. It was a life saving experience and healing for me and I know for others too.

The best advice I could give to anyone who self-abuses is to get yourself into a SAFE program as soon as you possibly could. They don't provide you with a magic wand, but they do provide you with a supportive, non-judgmental and safe environment in which to learn and change your behaviours. I'm not saying it will work for everyone, but it's your best bet if you really want to stop what you are doing to yourself. It's a lot of hard work, but the results **ARE** life-changing. I would hate to guess how many other self-abusing individuals there are out there, they need the same opportunity we were given, so get those SAFE in Oz programs happening and **PLEASE** keep them **SAFE!!! I am now 26 thanks to SAFE.**



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I was a self-abuser. In 1996 I had a lot of bad things happen to me and I tried to take my own life on several occasions. It all just seemed to go from bad to worse and all the times that things went wrong it seemed that I didn't know how to cope. So I just cut or hurt myself. I can't count the number of social workers, counselors and psychologists I have been through; I felt they were false and that I couldn't be honest with them. They were strangers who didn't know me from a bar of soap. Some made it obvious that they thought I was just trying to get attention and it was clear they really didn't understand self-abuse. A couple tried to show me that they cared, but it was too hard to trust anyone anymore because when I did trust someone they hurt me bad and ruined my life. In the past every time someone was nice to me there always seemed to be something they would want back. Male workers were like a red flag to a bull because of what had happened to me by a man.

I moved into a program that introduced me to SAFE. They helped me a lot to deal with myself harming, lack of self-esteem and worth, and lack of confidence. They treated me with dignity and respect something that I hadn't experienced for a long time. They also believed me and in me.

When I went to speak with Annie the manager of the program, she explained that it wouldn't be easy. But if I really wanted to stop and was willing to work hard, they would support and encourage me to learn new ways of coping so I didn't have to keep hurting myself.

I actually said straight out "No" because I didn't want to go through the terrible things that happened to me and all the bad memories again. A few days later I decided to ring the manager again and she invited me to go and talk with her more. Annie was so friendly and clearly expected nothing back, she just wanted me to try and help myself. She was very honest and promised me nothing because only I could do the changing. This talk made me decide that I had nothing to lose and that I would give it a go. I now know this to be the most important decision I have made in my life. It gave me my life!



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The first week started and I didn't feel unhappy at all, it was amazing and I really hadn't felt this way for such a long time. It was the light at the end of my tunnel and the hope that I needed to share with other people who also wanted to stop what they were doing and get their life back. There was so much unconditional support and I found that everything has a crack to let the light in! We learned that there was a humorous side to self-abuse and we did lots of smiling and laughter because it has been proven that if you are smiling or laughing you can't be sad. We shared many tears, hugs and affirmations too.

It was very hard on and off but I did complete the program and graduated. It was very important to celebrate with everyone and be acknowledged for the hard work we all did. The manager of SAFE and her staff were very nice and willing to help out and support us all when we needed it. They gave us all so much support and they challenged us too. We all went away knowing we were good people who deserved kindness, not just from others, but from ourselves. I learned that Challenge is all your dreams come true... if only you have the courage to pursue them. You need courage and faith in yourself and the rewards are priceless with SAFE.

I think that there needs to be a peer support group for people who self-abuse until they can get into a program. Family, carers, friends and workers also need a support group so they can learn more and be able to share their experiences because self-abusers are hard to be with or work with and are often put in the too hard to handle basket. I was until SAFE came into my life.

I have not hurt myself since February 2002. I have moved inter-state, changed my name, done some TAFE and have a full-time job with a mental health support agency. I now help others to help themselves too. Juliet - 27 years old.

Hi, my name is Kel, I am 26 and leading a happy, 'normal' and fulfilling life. Although Annie would say that the only normal she knew was the cycle on a



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washing machine or the type of shampoo I used in the shower!

I am very proud to announce that since my participation in the SAFE program, I have been abuse-free since Saturday the 8th of September 2001. The SAFE program increased my awareness, educated me in why I self-abused, and gave me ongoing support and encouragement with the end result of dramatically changing my life for the better. I would go as far to say that it actually saved my life. If I hadn't stopped hurting myself so badly I truly believe I would never have made it to my 21st Birthday.

Whether I accidentally took that few too many pills or cut that bit too deep and hit an artery, it was just a matter of time. I felt like a big black round bomb whose fuse was burning out of control and one day help wouldn't get to me in time. SAFE call it accidental suicide and that is what it is because we don't want to kill ourselves, we just need to kill the internal pain using physical pain to bring us back from the dissociation we often deeply sink into. The trouble is it's short-term relief for long-term damage, or death!

As a young girl, year 7 in high school, I was walking home from school, after attending an afterhours sports club, when I suddenly got grabbed from behind and dragged into the bush where this evil man hit me and punched me and finally raped me using every orifice I had in my body that he could fit in, leaving me for dead I wasn't found until the next morning. I don't remember anything after he had done his awful deeds then tried to kick and punch me to death. I spent 2 weeks in intensive care and a further 12 weeks in hospital, then came rehab!

My parents showed such concern to the public and others until we were behind doors, then it must have been my fault, I must have encouraged him, I was a dirty little slut who deserved what I got. Yes, I did say my parents! It was hard to work out if it was them or the alcohol talking, whatever it was it hurt and hurt deeply. So, I would hide in my room away from them, here in my sanctuary I learned a survival behaviour called self-abuse.



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It started with pinching Mum's sleepers and valium, they made me sleep and took me away from the hell I felt inside, they soothed the inner pain. Then I soon realized having some alcohol with them gave a more intensive outcome and made me sleep so much longer.

Thankfully I had an adorable Aunty who believed in me and helped me by letting me stay with her heaps. When she realized what I was doing she helped me. Once I was 14 and able to divorce my parents, I moved in with my Aunty. We were able to get a restraining order against my parents which stopped them from threatening me. My Aunty also got me help to get off the valium and sleepers. There was no alcohol allowed in the house either.

Then 4 months later my Aunty became quite ill, after many tests and visits to specialists she was told that she had a very aggressive cancer and had a maximum of 6 months to live. She lasted 2! Suddenly I felt 11 again! My whole life fell apart and the small amount of progress I had made suddenly was shattered. I couldn't go back to my parents, so the only choice I had was foster parents and I had to move away for this. It was obvious that they could not cope with the obvious trauma and distress I seemed to constantly be in and outwardly demonstrating.

Again my room became my sanctuary, with the excuse I was studying. My compass became my new survival behaviour starting with deep scratching, then one night I must have cut a little too hard and my blood started to flow. I can't put into words the relief I felt watching the blood drip out of my leg. I always wore trousers, so legs were easy to hide! For about 6 months I found myself cutting every day and sometimes several times a day to try and ease the pain. Then I became sick, several of the cuts had become so infected that I got toxic poisoning and was rushed to hospital in an ambulance, the secret was out which totally freaked my foster parents and they didn't want me back. So they sent me to new foster parents and within a week it was very clear it wasn't going to work, their eldest son didn't waste any time in letting me know what he wanted and



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would get, whatever it took. So I pinched the foster Mum's purse and took the window exit in the early hours of the morning and made a run for it. I didn't want to steal, but it was only way of escaping.

I lived on the streets for a while, then the police caught up with me and they gave me a warning. I got a job at Macca's and found myself a flat. But I couldn't keep my job and became mentally very unstable. I spent a while in the psych ward and then got put on a disability pension. Still harming at least once daily, life was getting so out of control until my case manager suggested I join the SAFE program, as if that would help! How wrong was I!

The facilitator was so real, her passion was infectious and inspirational to a point that I became determined to not only successfully stop my self-abusive behaviours, but also to go back to study and become a helper for others. I am currently studying Cert IV in Mental Health and will graduate in June.

SAFE provided me with the skills necessary to identify my feelings, triggers and negative self-talk, and deal with them more appropriately, along with the knowledge and ability that enabled me to stop my self-abusive behaviours.

It's not just the physical wounds that we inflict on ourselves that are so destructive, it's the self-defeating behaviours, where we constantly tell ourselves we are worthless, useless and don't deserve to be liked, instead we deserve to be punished and be unhappy. We see ourselves as horrible, ugly and undeserving people. We trust no-one and push everything to the limit, shunning anyone who tries to be caring because they are bound to want something in return. We don't believe in unconditional anything; everything has a condition or expectation placed on it!

I say we, because I know that I am not the only one who feels this way and it was SAFE that helped me realize I was not alone in my struggle with self-abuse. This alone gives you hope and the program instils that hope.



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If you are self-abusing in any way, you need to get help straight away, the longer you leave it, the harder it is to stop. Self-abuse can become an addiction for some. Not being bias, of course, but a SAFE program has to be the best option, it worked for me!

If you're a significant other, you need to be supportive and understanding and very very patient! You need to find information and support to be able to understand and cope with what is happening. Please don't be an ostrich and bury your head in the sand - you could suffocate! Try not to let us push you away, we tend to be very good at that! Try to encourage the self-abuser to seek some supportive and practical assistance to deal with their condition. Check out for any SAFE programs in your area.

The important thing to always remember is that we can recover, manage our lives and be happy again - I am thanks to SAFE and the **BITCH** [Annie]! As Mary would say, there is always hope where there is life! I'm sure that was her saying. Keep SAFE always.

- Babe
- In
- Total
- Control of
- Herself



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