

Self harm and cutting – an excerpt from my memoir 'My Alien Self: My Journey Back to Me'

An excerpt from my memoir....

It was a whole seventeen years later, in 2006, I rediscovered the rape as I searched through my diaries while undergoing therapy for my depression. I felt uneasy about myself when I read about this incident with Vinnie, as if I were reading the diary of someone else, with her dirty little secrets and self destructive behaviours, not a fifteen-year-old version of myself. I wasn't a virgin when Vinnie raped me, but I didn't deserve that.

Not long after that, I cut myself.

Christmas has always been a time for celebration and family.

I remember Christmas 1989 very well, three months after I was raped but of course it couldn't hurt me then because I had pushed it to a place so deep I couldn't retrieve it. Not yet. I guess that's why I made the cuts. Of course I was only an amateur at that form of self-harm: not a real cutter with my measly thirteen holes and a few knife or compass flesh wounds – unlucky for some? Thirteen holes in my ears. I never questioned why I did it. Or why I did any of the things I did. I suppose I just did it. But when I think of it now it must've been a reaction to what happened. The memory of Vinnie I had shut away. He couldn't hurt me, but I could hurt myself.

Every time I made another cut I liked the way it felt

I got a small gold stud ready to put in the new hole in my flesh and placed it on my chest of drawers in my bedroom. I closed my bedroom door. Using a ball point pen, I made a small mark on my ear where I wanted the next piercing to be. I burnt the end of the needle with one of my collection of novelty lighters; the one shaped as a gun that my mum had bought me.

I pulled my ear lobe out with my fingers, to make it taut and ready for a new hole, watching in my bedroom mirror all the time. I placed the needle onto the pen mark and pushed onto it to pierce the skin, using fairly hard pressure. Once it pierced the skin, I jabbed it right through the thick flesh and took it out quickly, replacing it with the gold stud and fastening the back in place; finished with a good dab of surgical spirit.

I threw myself onto my bed. My little ritual didn't satisfy me. Twiddling with my thumbs and wiggling my toes, I stared at the ceiling, struggling with my brain to think of what to do next. I didn't have any more spare earrings to fill new holes with. Then, I had an idea. I leapt up, grabbed my pencil case out of my college bag and took out my compass. I burnt the compass point using one of my Zippo lighters, enjoying the smell of petrol it emitted. All ready.

Using the sharp compass point, I began to scratch the knuckle of my left index finger. One line down, about one centimetre in length. One line across, about half centimetre. An L shape. Several times needed going over the same lines to make it bleed and make the letter clearly defined on my skin. Sharp, scratching, pain, self inflicted relief. It gave me relief – the enjoyment I was looking for. And it was something different. A word will soon be etched across the hand, and then I will be satisfied. Next knuckle, scratching, digging with the compass point. Circular. An O. Needed to be more careful with the O. Next knuckle, a V. The pain, very nice, scratching and digging, bright red blood and jagged edges to the letters. The taste, lovely, natural, as I sucked on the cuts. Next and last the knuckle of my little finger, an E. LOVE. Marvellous!

When I showed Mum she wasn't amused and nor was Dad. So after that instead of carving something they could see, I resorted to using the bread knife sawing little lines into my forearms – deep enough to bleed but not so deep they would scar, although a couple did very slightly.

I'd been going out with a guy called Zack for a week who didn't ring or come round and he said he would that evening. I phoned him and he said he was sorry. I felt dreadful, and grabbed the knife from the bread board in the kitchen and headed upstairs to my bedroom with it.

Everyone was out.

I rolled up the left sleeve of my sweater and with the knife in my right hand I rested the blade on my left forearm before pressing down and sliding the blade down. The serrated edges caught my skin and dragged it, so I had to saw up and down a couple of times before drawing blood. The cut, the blood, the soreness, all had the power of relief for me. I put cotton wool and plasters over it, after squeezing the luscious red liquid out for a moment and tasting it, then rolling my sleeve back down. Mum and Dad came home later and I stayed up with them and watched Top Gun.

I cut myself just a few times. I wanted to do far bigger cuts and bleed much more, fantasising about it regularly, but I resisted. I didn't want to ruin my looks too much and I was very much into how my body looked. I wanted to love my body. It was one good thing that I had that men wanted.

The word love featured quite a lot in my life. Not because I was told I was loved by my parents, because I wasn't, only in birthday and Christmas cards, but because I wanted love. In my diary under miscellaneous I came across something I'd written. It said please love me.

When I think about it now I was shown love. I just didn't always feel it.