

# Leading Issues Journal

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## Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey Editor

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This issue of ACLW's Leading Issues Journal features a significant personal reflection by Casey Hirst of her experiences working in the field of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Mexico. Casey is an Australian living in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Luis Gómez Romero, a senior lecturer in human rights, constitutional law and legal theory, and María de la Macarena Iribarne González, a lecturer at the law school, both at the University of Wollongong, attest to the fact that Mexico is Latin America's second-deadliest place for women after Brazil. In their article published by The Conversation at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-08-21/mexican-women-are-angry-about-rape-murder-and-government-neglect-and-they-want>, they write: "With 1,812 women murdered between January and July this year — about 10 a day — Mexico is Latin America's second-most dangerous country for women, after Brazil, according to the United Nations. More than 200 Mexican women have been kidnapped so far in 2019...Yet Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — who was elected last year in a landslide with a progressive gender agenda and promises to "transform" Mexico — has not followed through on promises to expand women's rights. In fact, his administration has rolled back some of the few federal policies designed to protect and empower Mexican women."

In her article, Casey Hirst explains why she chooses to continue her work in DFV in Mexico, despite the incredible challenges she faces including the country's profuse culture of domestic violence, entrenched gender bias, and feeling personally unsafe being a woman. Casey recounts her experience of DV in Mexico and asks, "How did I, a smart and strong woman with a career of working in domestic violence, find myself in a controlling relationship with a violent man?"

Casey Hirst's article is a powerful and moving reflection of a resilient and courageous woman determined to be present for women in Mexico who experience gender abuse and violence as a norm, and her resolve to "*educate the boys and men around me and encourage women to safely find their options when they need them.*"

Also featured in this Issue is Thomas Mayor's reflection of witnessing the momentous creation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017. Thomas explains the impact it has had on him and how he is galvanising a national Call to Action. If you would like to register your support and access campaign materials, Thomas Mayor's campaign website is [www.1voiceuluru.org](http://www.1voiceuluru.org). Thomas believes that "we will only find the heart of our nation when the First peoples — the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders — are recognised with a representative Voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution." His new book, 'Finding the Heart of the Nation' includes interviews with 20 key Indigenous people whose voices, he observes, make clear what the Uluru Statement is and why it is so important. He hopes readers will be moved to join them, along with the growing movement of Australians who want to see substantive constitutional change.

Finally as we await the national release of the movie 'Ride Like a Girl,' the story of Michelle Payne, the first female jockey to win the Melbourne Cup, this Issue features a short personal reflection by Natalie Scanlon on when and how she developed resilience and how it enabled her to find her purpose in her career. Rachel Griffiths, Director of 'Ride Like a Girl' says she was inspired to make the movie by Payne's 'persistence, resilience, determination, focus and passion.'

I hope you find ACLW's 2019 Leading Issues Journal insightful.

## Casey Hirst



Casey Hirst is a young Australian woman living in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. She is an advocate for children's rights, and a specialist in the field of domestic and family violence. With over 8 years of experience, working with children who have experienced trauma, in Mexico and Australia, Casey recently opened a community centre which offers extra-curricular educational programs for women and children in the rural community of La Barra de Colotepec. Currently studying psychology & counselling, Casey attended the University of New England and TAFE NSW and has extensive experience in research and writing, primarily with non-profit organisations. Casey is available for any casual writing, research, editing or proofreading.

## Machismo and Domestic Violence in Oaxaca, Mexico

### Casey Hirst

For an Australian woman deciding to move to Mexico and support community development, one of the greatest worries is her safety. And there is an overwhelming amount of evidence to support this concern. Mexico is a violent country. A country where interpersonal violence is the second leading cause of premature death and disability, and 66% of the female population will have experienced gender-based violence in her lifetime; the greater majority of which will be experienced in her home from a partner or

family member. That's over 42 million women. Almost double the inhabitants of Australia.

Mexico, like any other country, can be a very safe and beautiful place to live or visit. Precaution and respect for the local culture is always recommended when abroad; however, for a woman, understanding and navigating the *machismo* culture in Mexico can be particularly challenging. Learning to keep your mouth shut

when you see violence on the street because, “It has nothing to do with you white girl”, or understanding that it is simply safer to be accompanied by a man in certain places, becomes frustrating. The reality is, women are second-class citizens and reports to the authorities regarding violence against women, is rarely met with serious attention. Since impunity for perpetrators is rampant, 82 percent of Mexican women say they routinely feel unsafe.



*Idyllic coastal town on the coast of Oaxaca, Mexico. Approximately 50,000 inhabitants, where domestic violence and machismo culture is prevalent, with no apparent DFV support services.*

Have I felt personally unsafe in my 5 years living in Mexico? Yes. Have I felt more unsafe than living in Australia? No. Has my concern for my well-being given me motivation to leave my hopes and dreams for Mexico and return to Australia? No; however I have learnt to play by the *machismo* rules.

In 2014 I made the decision to move to a small coastal town in the state of Oaxaca. I was working for a domestic violence agency in Sydney at the time and had recently spent 3 months studying, holidaying and

falling in love with this culture-rich community. As a passionate feminist and advocate against domestic and family violence (DFV), I felt a calling to support women and children here. A small amount of research revealed that there appeared to be no domestic violence support services, very little support from the department of families (DIF) for at-risk children, and a general lack of knowledge around DFV.

**The “*machismo*” or “*macho*” culture** has much to answer for the prevalence of DFV across Latin America. From the day children are born, they are assigned gender-roles. Boys are generally seen as more valuable; and girls, exist to support men. Women are taught their gender roles and how to behave or what to wear to avoid trouble.

A common story for a Mexican girl born into a rural community in Oaxaca: she would be one of 3 or more children, taught from a very early age that females are less valuable than males; and the women in the house are responsible for domestic chores, i.e. cleaning, cooking, washing clothes (generally by hand) and caring for any younger siblings. She will attend school for approximately 6 years, with frequent absences due to minding younger siblings or helping her mother/older siblings with local family business or maintaining the household. It is likely she will experience some form of domestic violence in her family home.

Leaving school between the ages of twelve and fourteen, she will either spend her days at home or helping the family business - often a local store or restaurant ‘comedor’ attached to the family home. **Between the ages of 15-19 she will fall pregnant with her first child. As abortion is illegal in Oaxaca, and heavily stigmatised, she will move into the family home of the father of her child, (with his parents and often, extended family) and raise her child. During her partnership she is likely to be subject to varying forms of domestic violence (this situation is more exaggerated for indigenous girls, where almost a quarter will be**

married by the age of fifteen and have more than double the average number of children). She is unlikely to be able to support herself and her children on her own, and will be expected to stay with her child's father even in cases of infidelity and abuse.

A great majority of DFV goes unnoticed in many parts of Mexico, where 14.9% of women approve or understand punishment for neglecting her spousal chores as wife and homemaker. Many women don't recognise they are victims of DFV, they assume that violence is limited to the physical; although in reported cases, 89.2% were due to emotional violence, 56.4% economic violence, 25.8% physical violence and 11.7% reported due to sexual violence.

Ana\* is one of the women who doesn't believe she has ever been in a violent relationship. I became friends with Ana several years ago. A single mother from out of town with few friends and no close family nearby. She became pregnant with her son, Gael\*, at the age of 15, gave birth at 16 and now at 24, is pregnant with her second child to a different father. Ana had a dysfunctional relationship with Gael's father, Jesus\*, which ended when he impregnated another young girl and left Ana and their son. Prior to this, Ana had tried to leave Jesus on several occasions; however, he threatened to take Gael to his mother's home in another state where Ana would be refused to see him.

This year, Ana started a new relationship with a local man, and alcoholic, Nico\*. Ana has been with Nico for 6 months and is 4 months pregnant. Nico refuses to wear condoms and, as Ana's funds are limited, birth control was not prioritised. Several weeks ago she came to me and told me that she had syphilis and had spoken to Nico who refused to get tested or treatment. His response was, "You must've been sleeping around." Refusing to take any responsibility. Ana said she had spoken with Nico on several occasions saying, "If you are going to be with other girls, you have to use protection." This behaviour by Nico is sadly typical of the machismo sexual identity. Ana has a 40% chance of losing her baby due to this preventable virus and is at a loss as to what her options are. She has started treatment but knows it is futile while Nico continues to have unprotected sex with other women, and expects Ana to continue to be sexually available to him. Sadly, this is her, and so many other young girls' reality. I can see her future in many women I have met here: lonely, feeling trapped and neglected, knowing that there is no easy way to better her situation.

**In this town there is no women's refuge or safe house, no center for domestic and family violence support, and many local doctor's provide little information for women on the subject of DFV and their rights. It is disheartening that in 2017 there were just 72 domestic violence refuges for women and children escaping violence across Mexico. In a country with a population of 129.2 million people (50.21% being female), that equates to approximately one shelter per 900,000 women. To be accepted into one of these shelters, women must have commenced legal proceedings to separate from their partner. These few refuges are not suited for everybody. There has to be more support and information.**

During my own experience in a DV relationship, I found little comfort in speaking with local friends and didn't even consider seeking out authorities.

Late last year I dated Gustavo\*. I had recently sworn off local surfers, but he wore me down and I agreed

to several dates. He was charming and patient, good looking, an impressive surfer with his own property and seemed genuinely smitten by me - what a lucky girl!

I spent some time at his place: an indigenous beachside town. Here, my feminist values were challenged. It was a simple way of life. The men dedicated their time to employed physical labour or working on their own land and the women would keep busy caring for children, preparing meals and keeping the home in order. I questioned the demonstration of traditional roles, but somehow understood that it made complete sense. Men were physically different: stronger and more suited to the paid work available. Whereas women were simply better at things like cooking, cleaning, and organising the children. It seemed so simple, basic human anatomy and survival.

Early into the relationship Gustavo displayed some controlling personality traits when he was drinking. He wouldn't like a particular outfit I chose or easily became jealous of my male friends. I would pull him up on it, we would fight, and when he was sober, he would apologise and cry to me about his problems with alcohol and how he wanted to change for good. I could help him to be a better man if he could just kick the booze. Of course, in reality, I could not help him. His problems were a deep reflection of his culture and upbringing.

I lived 4 hours away from him and had commitments in my town. He had local employment so we visited each other on weekends or when we could. When I was away from him he would often ask me who I was with and what I was doing. I had many male friends but I never felt comfortable telling him I was spending time with them. He would ask for photos (selfies) of where I was and occasionally accuse me of sleeping with other guys. We would fight through text messages and I would have to block him for a few hours. This either gave him time to get more frustrated, or to calm down. It was always a risky move.

I understood that the cultural differences between us were enormous, but something in me wanted to try and work on this relationship. I was educated, making more money, better emotionally and socially equipped and not afraid to do things on my own. I knew I was independent and didn't need him. He knew it too, and he didn't like it.

During our short 3-month relationship, Gustavo had moments of intense anger, which at first I dismissed, and then, realising how unstable he was, I began to become concerned about this.

He threatened to kill me on several occasions, or to kill my dog. He had connections with local narcos and told me he had alerted them to who I was. He told me he was watching my house or had people watching

*"My desire to understand and assimilate to the local culture made me blindly tolerate violent and sexist behaviours I would have never expected"*

Casey Hirst



me when I'd leave the house. He once locked me in my room and refused to let me leave for dinner with my girlfriends. He would verbally abuse and insult me and I just took it all. I knew it wasn't right but I just kept waiting for him to get sick of me and leave. He was never going to accept me ending it.

One Saturday evening, when he was very drunk, we argued and I told him it was over. He cried to me for hours and begged me to forgive him. I didn't know how I was going to get out of the situation. In a moment of frustration I told him, "You would be better off with a Mexican woman who stays at home, cooks & cleans for you, doesn't question what you say, and is happy for you to make all her decisions." It was easier to suggest that he had chosen the wrong woman, rather than trying to convince him there was something wrong with his beliefs on how women should behave. I felt like I had betrayed all Mexican women in that one statement.

The next day he followed me to the beach. I sat with my girlfriend and we tried to ignore him - drunk and keeping an eye on us from a distance. In a moment of confrontation, after dribbling abuse, he bit me. It was the first physical violence where he had left a mark. I was out! Suddenly the reality of what I had been living for 3 months had manifested in a physical mark that I could see, and I knew that it was over. I went into a shock. Thoughts of, "How did I, a smart and strong women with a career of working in domestic violence, find myself in a controlling relationship with a violent man?"

Followed by the shame, "I knew what this was", "I should have seen the signs", "I was warned". I saw how I had made excuses: I blamed it on culture, on his upbringing, on my education and more emotionally mature, and I even blamed myself for being too confident and fearless. I blamed myself for being a caring Australian woman.

I took a bus to Guatemala the following week to create some space in the hope that he would let me go. I stayed just 5 days but told him I was there for 3 weeks. Almost a year on, I have still managed to avoid seeing him.

During the entire relationship, there was something inside of me knew that if things ever became too real, I could leave this place. I was fortunate enough to be born in Australia and I had the means to put myself on the next plane out of Mexico and to a safer place far far away. **Few women here have the option of leaving their home, their family, their community and everything they have ever known.**

My love for the beauty and magic of Mexico brought me here. I followed a calling I felt for many years. When I first planned to visit, I never expected I wouldn't want to leave.

*I have stayed for many reasons, the greatest of which is the desire to positively affect the lives of the women and children which I have come to know and love. To share my knowledge and education so that they may have a future with choices and live more peacefully. I subtly educate the boys and men around me and encourage women to safely find their options when they need them.*

Mexico is a violent country but it is also colourful, strong, passionate, resilient and loving and capable of

peace.

<http://www.healthdata.org/mexico>

[Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía \(INEGI\)](#) Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography.

<https://merionwest.com/2018/01/28/the-culture-of-machismo-in-mexico-harms-women/>

<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/mexico-city-gender-violence-protests-azcapotzalco.html>

<https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/natalidad/>

Note: Historically across Mexico, men are more likely to inherit family land as long as they (and their wives) provide and care for his parents

[http://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/54763348/Working-Paper\\_4.pdf](http://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/54763348/Working-Paper_4.pdf)

2014/15 AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.2014 v3.0 <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO927en.pdf>

\* Names have been changed to protect identities

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/59c116e24.html>

This story can fit 100-150 words.

The subject matter that appears in newsletters is virtually endless. You can include stories that focus on current technologies or innovations in your field.

You may also want to note business or economic trends, or make predictions for your customers or clients.

If the newsletter is distributed internally, you might comment upon new procedures or improvements to



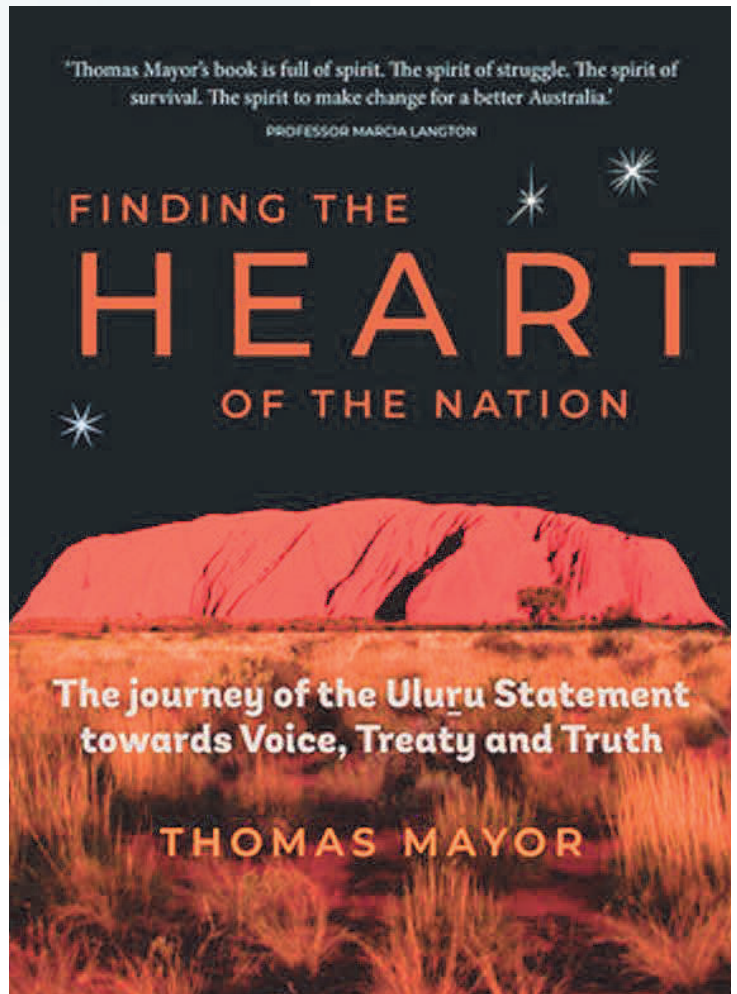
## Finding the Heart of the Nation Thomas Mayor



Thomas Mayor is a Torres Strait Islander man born on Larrakia country in Darwin. In high school, Thomas's English teacher suggested he should become a writer. He didn't think then that he would become one of the first ever Torres Strait Islander authors to have a book published for the general trade.

Instead, he became a wharf labourer from the age of seventeen, until he became a union official for the Maritime Union of Australia in his early thirties. As he gained the skills of negotiation and organising in the union movement, he applied those skills to advancing the rights of Indigenous peoples, becoming a signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and a tireless campaigner.

Following the Uluru Convention, Thomas was entrusted to carry the sacred canvas of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. He then embarked on an eighteen-month journey around the country to garner support for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations voice, and a Makarrata Commission for truth-telling and agreement-making or treaties. Thomas's journey continues, both in person and through the pages of his book, *Finding the Heart of the Nation*. He gifts this book to the Campaign for Voice, Treaty and Truth.



Hardie Grant Books | OCTOBER 2019

You can find Thomas:

@thomasmayor

@tommayor11

Join the conversation:

#findingtheheartofthenation

#ulurustatementfromtheheart

#ulurustatement

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*The Uluru Statement from the Heart was a national Indigenous consensus position on Indigenous constitutional recognition, which came out of a constitutional convention of 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates. Held at the foot of Uluru in Central Australia on the lands of the Anangu people, the statement called for the establishment of a 'First Nations Voice' enshrined in the Australia Constitution and the establishment of a 'Makarrata Commission' to supervise agreement-making and truth-telling between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Uluru Statement was the culmination of 13 Regional Dialogues held around the country. It comes after many decades of Indigenous struggles for recognition and calls for a stronger voice in their affairs.*

Source: [https://law.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/2764738/Uluru-Statement-from-the-Heart-Information-Booklet.pdf](https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2764738/Uluru-Statement-from-the-Heart-Information-Booklet.pdf)

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## Finding the Heart of the Nation

### Thomas Mayor

On 26 May 2017, I witnessed the creation of what will be a founding document of a completed Australian democracy - the Uluru Statement from the Heart. I had gathered with 270 fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we had come from all points of the southern sky. Our deliberations were unprecedentedly well informed and formulated; designed and run by First Nations people. The unprecedented Indigenous consensus, calling for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice, must now become a consensus from the Australian people.

What I saw on that day has inspired me. Not only because it was a moment of unity that moved many to tears of joy and hope. But also because the proposals, crafted from our collective history and experience, were reasonable yet powerful; visionary.

With the support of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), I took that vision to the Australian people as it was written and painted on the Uluru Statement canvas. **I took the Uluru Statement from remote communities to small towns, from festivals to conferences, to people from many political persuasions in all capital cities; everywhere I went, the Uluru Statement moved people.**

**With other passionate Indigenous leaders, we began a peoples movement. After more than twelve months of constant travel with the Uluru Statement canvas rolled into a cardboard postal cylinder, in April of 2018, I realised that I had a unique story to tell.**

On my journey with the Statement, I met incredible people. Ordinary, yet extraordinary. I thought, 'If only the rest of Australia could hear why these people support the Uluru Statement; if they would listen to their stories and see what I have seen, surely they will be moved to join the campaign.' I thought their stories and my experience would make a great book. But who would write it?

I am a wharfie. A labourer who eventually was chosen by my fellow maritime workers to be their leader – Branch Secretary of the MUA. I wasn't sure if I could write. Though I remembered that in Year 11, my English teacher said I would write a book one day. So, after asking my friend Marcia Langton for advice, and upon her suggestion that it would be a good idea, I began writing.

**My book, *Finding the Heart of the Nation*, is a collective of nineteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's stories. The book also tells my story, and features the artists who painted the beautiful Anangu art on the Uluru Statement; the lead artist, Rene Kulitja, is introduced by world class film maker, Rachel Perkins. I invited Marcia Langton, for her invaluable experience and unflinching take on why the First**

**Nations Voice is needed; and Danny Glover, for the actor and human rights activists international experience; to write a short piece each toward the books conclusion. The book concludes with what it is ultimately about – a call to action.**

Writing the book was an amazing experience in itself. For each section of the book, I retraced my footsteps from the first 12 months of the campaign, revisiting the country where the subject person is from. They generously gave me their time; they shared their hopes and aspirations; they told of their heartbreak and struggles. I have done my best to share *their* voices in the pages of the book. I have written as a narrator in an attempt to go deeper than questions and answers. I have written what I observed and felt; I share how their emotions were expressed to me. I wanted to put the reader in my seat in the hope that the book will ultimately move people.

One of the remarkable people I interviewed is Gargu Kanai. Gargu is from Moalgal (Moa Island) in the Torres Strait Islands. Gargu tells how her mother and father would strategise with the late Eddie Mabo (*“Uncle Koiki”*) in the 1970’s. They were activists in the early days of the push for Land Rights. Gargu remembers waiting for her parents as they took hand delivered letters to Ministers and other key decision makers, because if they didn’t, the letters would never reach their target. In an emotional moment in the interview, Gargu reached into her heart, and through tears of sorrow, she shared how she has often found herself floating between two worlds. As if her life’s hurdles were foreseen, in her grandmothers language, Gargu means lily-pad.

Gargu is just one example from ten interviews with women who each have a unique story to tell. There is also Jill Gallagher, a Gunditjmara woman. Jill is the first treaty commissioner in Australia navigating a difficult course to what could be the nations first treaty between the State of Victoria and a collective of First Nations. In her childhood, Jill went to nineteen different primary schools as her family travelled for fruit picking – the only work Indigenous people could get.

There is young Teela Reid, a Wiradjuri Wailwan woman, who went from the little town of Gilgandra to becoming a legal aid lawyer in Sydney, was inspired by her grandfather and her sense of the need for law reform for Indigenous people.

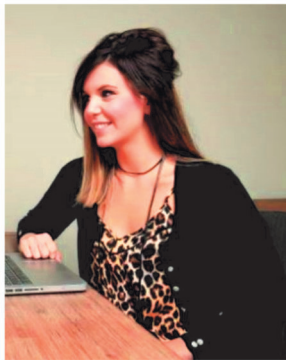
Unforgettable is Darlene Mansell, a formidable Pakana Moonbird woman who will not tolerate misogyny. During the constitutional regional dialogues that led to the making of the Uluru Statement, she demanded that women are heard.

Each of these women relate to the calls of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in their own way. Each of them are asking for all Australians to walk with them.

I hope all Australians will read my book. I hope that when they do, they will listen to the voices within the pages, and be moved to action. It is my hope that the voices, the beautiful images and the captivating cover will help us find the heart of the nation together.



## Natalie Scanlon



Natalie Scanlon is the Founder of the international copywriting agency, Written Communications. Natalie has extensive experience in copywriting, law and communications.

### Resilience as a Changemaker - Natalie Scanlon

I've always been a big believer in the power of resilience partnered with optimism.

Resilience is fundamental when turning what can be seen as a failure or setback into a positive movement for change and success.

It's something that doesn't appear to be taught, but rather embedded amongst the layers of our being; our deeper self.

My first taste of resilience was when I was 23. It was 2012, and I had just been accepted into a postgraduate Law degree. I was working full-time at a rural legal firm as a clerk, where my passion for justice and determination to achieve equality for the minorities was strong.

It was at this time that I found out my father had throat cancer. My relationship with my dad wasn't considered 'textbook'. He and my mum had separated many, many years before. I rarely saw him.

However, due to the circumstances, I was my dad's next-of-kin. And, as the roller-coaster of terminal cancer began, so did my role as carer.

Because of the circumstances, I was often on leave or away from my job. I had to put my university studies on hold. Everything in my life stopped. It was my dad's wellbeing that came first, and I'm proud of myself for making that decision.

One autumn morning, I travelled from Peter Mac Cancer Centre to my law clerk job, 50 minutes away. My dad was staying at accommodation in Kew, and I was coming home on the Monday morning to start my working week. I got called into my boss' office. He shut the door, and raised his voice. He vocalised his disappointment in me as a worker, and how if I were to miss any more work, my job wouldn't be there.

I quit on the spot... and had every thought that my life, there and then, was over. My career was over. My university had halted. I was lost and confused, emotional and concerned. It was a terrible time in my life.

I continued looking after my dad, and working three casual jobs at once. None in the field of law. However, I still had a fire to pursue a role that was dedicated to helping others, using my skills in writing and law.

At the beginning of 2013, I obtained a role as a negotiator at a not-for-profit organisation. I was able to work with Applicants who were suffering from financial hardship and were at high-risk of suicide. I negotiated disputes relating to their banking and finance.

In October 2013, my dad lost his battle with cancer. This was inevitable. But, with the saddest of losses birthed the strongest of comebacks.

I now own my own international copywriting business that helps people break communication barriers, worldwide. If it weren't for my first meeting with resilience, I know this opportunity would have never been obtained.

I owe that first meeting with resilience a helluva lot.