

## RECOVERING FROM INTIMATE VIOLENCE AND RELEARNING TO ACCEPT LIFE'S "ROSES"

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**Güler Altunbas** endured physical, emotional and sexual violence from a young age. Here, to mark **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence**, she shares her experiences and explains how she's now using art to recognise other survivors and victims.

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I'm grateful to be alive and able to speak about the family violence and private violence I have endured. I have been surviving many such traumas since childhood up until my early forties.

Grief, pain and struggle can be seen as something we do in private or suffer in silence. Publicly, I share this sadness and vulnerability, with you. I'm reaching out and saying you're not alone, there is hope.

We honour men that go to war—the combat of soldier verses soldier. There is a Shrine of Remembrance and a public holiday for such combat.

Yet one women and countless children die each week from violence.

Let's support and consider children who are facing this violence. They are in a combat situation too. Often behind closed doors.

## My personal story

Back in prep, I remember catching the bus home from Yarra Park Primary School. A girl with a blue t-shirt walked up to me and yanked on the house key that was hanging around my neck, attached by elastic. When she let go of it, it smacked into my chin and really hurt. I cried.

Later that night when my parents arrived home, I was still crying.

My mother gave me a smack across the face and shook me. She said that if I complained or cried again I'd get hit twice as hard from her.

My mother Asuman was nasty, aggressive and physically violent throughout my childhood and adolescence, towards both my father and I. I always got into trouble. Everyday. About something. Anything. About chores. About cleaning up to her standards. And about my weight.

I remember dad coming in that night and looking at me. I remember telling him the story about the girl with the blue t-shirt. He gave me a hug.

My father Cosan, who passed away in 2001, was generous, kind and loving. Through out my childhood and as a young adult, I remember him often consoling me about life situations.

He used to say "if someone throws you a knife catch it and throw them back a rose."

Since his death I have added my own layers to this metaphor. I have learned to throw myself a rose instead of a knife, and to receive and accept roses.

The last incident of my mother's violence was when I was sixteen. We were on holidays and she hit me with her stilettos. Blood spurted from my head and my dad took me to the doctors. I needed two stitches.

Soon after that, I was in an arranged marriage. It lasted four years.

My experience of that marriage, from the very first night, was of sexual assaults. I was hit and had a large knife held to my neck regularly.

I feared for my life most of the time.

My mother had returned to Australia towards the end of those four awful years. She said she had heard he was hitting me and asked if that was true. I said yes. She insisted I leave him.

I couldn't believe my mum was saying this, and not wanting me to be abused. I hadn't wanted to confide in her, because I'd feared she would hurt me twice as much.

I left him and the police were involved. He stalked me. So I had to find a new place to live. Then he found my new place of residence. I was in fear for my life a lot.



Güler is a practicing visual artist based in Melbourne

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### **Our shared story**

Unfortunately, this pattern is not rare in Australia.

Aspects of our society are broken. As a community, we need to acknowledge past and present victims and survivors of such abuses, and question this violence and its impact.

Because of my experiences, I have kept a vigil going for almost twenty years. I developed a memorial website (originally on Geocities and then later Vicnet) which still exists at [shrineforus.com](http://shrineforus.com)

I have pursued the idea of a physical shrine or memorial for women and children who experience violence, and have endured countless knockbacks.

Last year, in collaboration with cohealth, my dream came true.

I attended a weekend workshop at the foundry in Fitzroy to make a bronze sculpture called *Question Why*, based on a painting of a woman I had created earlier. It took more than 160 hours to sculpt.



*Question Why* now sits on display at cohealth's offices in Collingwood, and provides a place of reflection for people who have experienced or are affected by family violence.

It demonstrates that we aren't going to put up with such atrocities anymore.

### **The happy ending**

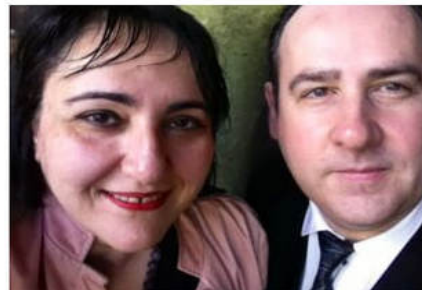
There is a happy ending, I can assure you.

About eight years ago my life turned around for the better. I met my now fiancée Adam who I thank a lot for supporting me and being my rock.

He is the strongest yet gentlest man. He has cherished and encouraged me to heal.

So remember: 'when someone throws you a knife catch it and throw them back a rose'.

Allow & accept roses to come to you. And give yourself roses too.



**If you or someone you know is experiencing violence or abuse, you can contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732**

Links:

[shrineforus.com](http://shrineforus.com)

[Shrine and Memorial for Survivors Victims of Private Family Violence \(Facebook\)](#)