

# beauty WITHIN

## REMARKABLE WOMEN DISPLAYING BEAUTY AND STRENGTH IN HARD TIMES

Sometimes learning to love yourself, and being able to embrace your quirks and imperfections can be hard. But especially when faced with trauma and stress, or when challenging times are thrust upon you, it is easy to forget the person you are and the beauty you bring to the world. It is during these dark days that you feel your most alone, vulnerable and lacking in confidence. And sometimes, all you need is a reminder – of who you are, what you have survived, the resilience it has taken for you to get to where you are today.

Each woman showcased here has faced her own personal adversity, and has been nominated by a family member or a friend to receive a gentle reminder that she is worthy ... she matters ... she is beautiful.

### SOME POINTERS TO HELP YOU THROUGH DARK DAYS:

- Reach out to a friend/family member: confide in an individual who allows you to communicate your truth, rather than what is comfortable or expected.
- Join a support group: there is comfort in being with individuals who are experiencing similar difficulties.
- Seek professional intervention: psychologists are trained to assist with such life difficulties.
- Remember: your struggles are but one part of you; they don't define you.
- Do more of what helps or works, and less of what doesn't.
- Ask yourself: is there something I can feel proud of in terms of how I am handling my difficult journey?

### DEALING WITH DARK TIMES

Michelle Andrews, a clinical psychologist in private practice, explains that we react to difficulties in a multitude of ways. "Our response to trauma is coloured, to a degree, by our protective factors which, dependent on a situation, can be interchangeable."

Andrews explains that we are subjected to social pressures that determine whether or not we should talk about certain things, how we should communicate about our hardships, and how we should react to traumas. "If we subscribe to this social construction of what is acceptable following trauma, it may limit our healing."

She adds: "Think of a beach ball; you can hold the ball under water for only so long, until it breaks the surface and lands where you least expect it to. Similarly, we can disguise the gravity of our struggles only for so long; then the effect of our traumatic experience becomes apparent when we least expect it to."

Andrews believes that secrecy around our struggle results in isolation, and awards trauma significant power in our life. By talking about our difficulties, we remove some of this power. "In other words, it is through our authenticity that we find freedom and strength. Talking about trauma is not necessarily reliving it, but rather reconstructing it," she says. Negative events can overwhelm us if not organised, processed or made sense of, and a meaning constructed.

"The process of re-storying is important in facilitating post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth encapsulates the belief that through difficulties, positive alterations in cognitions, emotions and beliefs about self can take place," she explains. For example, certain relationships are strengthened or re-evaluated, our definition of self in terms of our abilities can be broadened, and often our perception of life is altered. Such growth often emanates from facing our obstacles; however, being in such an uncomfortable place is not easy, and self-care is needed.

### TYNE LANKWARDEN

At the age of 29, Tyne found a lump on her left breast. She was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer. Her option: a radical double mastectomy, with chemotherapy and radiation. Tyne explains that, within two months, she went from a carefree young woman in her 20s to what she describes as a broken and ruined person.

"Shortly after celebrating my victory over cancer, I went to the hospital for a quick nebuliser, thinking I was just having a mild asthma attack. Little did I know that a routine chest X-ray would reveal that my right lung was all but full of liquid, and that there were large tumours in and around my lungs and chest."

She tells how months of chemo, radiation, financial issues, depression and severe physical changes make it extremely difficult for you to look in the mirror, when you barely recognise the naked body in front of you. Optimism is key for Tyne, and she describes how relieved she was to discover that she had a well-shaped head, after she lost her hair to her cancer treatments.

Tyne's friend, Yolanda, describes how Tyne has taught her so much about life, love and friendship, and has made her appreciate everything she has.

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CANCER IS NOT EASY AND IT  
CANNOT BE SUGAR-COATED, BUT  
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PHOTOGRAPHY: CANDICE ASKHAM



“  
I HAVE REALISED  
THAT EVERYONE IS  
BEAUTIFUL IN THEIR  
OWN WAY, AND  
I WANT OTHER  
PEOPLE  
TO REMEMBER  
THAT TOO  
”

COURTNEY LANSDELL

In 2012, Courtney was diagnosed with temporal lobe epilepsy, after a serious bout of encephalitis. The teenager has been suffering from severe depression ever since – compounded by the fact that her father, absent for a number of years, is currently serving time in Pretoria Central Prison. This, she says, has had a huge impact on her and how she lives her life.

Sharon, Courtney’s mother, says that no one her daughter’s age should have to go through what she has gone through.

Looking at this bubbly, confident young woman, you would never guess that she had been bullied by her classmates to such an extent that she had had to leave her previous high school and move to another, nor that she has been in and out of rehab, or that she recently attempted suicide. Her personality shines through in the way she carries herself.

“The best advice I can give to someone who might be going through what I have is to get help if you need it,” says Courtney. “By talking to people about what I was going through, I was able to block out the negativity in my life. In the past, I would have done absolutely anything to fit in, and now I am learning to accept myself and focus on my own happiness.”

Courtney says her mom has been her biggest source of strength and encouragement through her journey to self-acceptance. Sharon, in turn, just wants her daughter to see how strong and accomplished she is, and believes that this is the first step in that direction.

In September 2012, Tsholo was at war with her body. A chest X-ray revealed that she had Swyer-James Syndrome, which meant that a portion of one of her lungs had not developed properly. This led to shortness of breath, coughing and weakness. However, even with treatment, Tsholo’s symptoms continued, and she was later diagnosed with TB.

“I was put onto TB treatment and, shortly afterwards, I realised that I was allergic to the treatment. I developed severe scarring and pigmentation on my body, which is called Steven-Johnson Syndrome,” Tsholo says.

She explains that her road to recovery has been extremely trying, painful and hard on her emotionally. The times she spent in hospital were some of the hardest she has ever had to go through. What helped her to get through those darkest days was engaging with her family, friends and doctors as openly as she could, as a way of creating a support system.

“I try to keep in mind how far I have come, and so I carry these marks on my skin with pride, and see them as a sign of a war that I won. What matters is that I have life!” she says.

Tshidi, who has been one of those support structures, looks at Tsholo with pride. “She is so young, yet has come through so much and is so strong.”

TSHOLOFELLO LEBALLO

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IMPERFECTLY  
PERFECT’ IS ONE  
OF MY FAVOURITE  
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IMPERFECTIONS  
MAKE US  
WHO WE ARE,  
BEAUTIFULLY  
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AND THAT IS  
WHAT MAKES US  
PERFECT  
”



PHOTOGRAPHY: CANDICE ASKHAM



### GANI THANGURANE

"My daughter, Roxanne, was born on 20 June 1990. She was my first child and the apple of her father's eye. My daughter was a free spirit who had chosen to be a journalist, and we were so proud of her," says Gani.

At the age of 22 and a young mother herself, Roxanne was working as a journalist at the Star newspaper when tragedy struck. On 2 August 2012, she was involved in an accident on her way home from work.

"When we arrived at the hospital, Roxanne was still alive, but these were the last moments I got to spend with my daughter, the beautiful mother of my grandson, Brooklyn," says Gani. "I managed to have a talk with her in her quietness, kissing her and bidding her farewell, and promising her I would raise her son the way we had raised her."

On Wednesday, 2 August 2012, Roxanne passed away with her mother at her side, holding her hand. Gani explains that coming to terms with the loss of her daughter has been the hardest thing she has ever had to go through, but is now at peace with herself. "There is no doubt that I miss her, especially the conversations we used to have, but I take great comfort in knowing that Roxanne was a remarkable young lady and an incredible mother to her son Brooklyn," Gani adds.

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TAKE EACH DAY AS IT COMES; ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL THE GRIEF. CELEBRATE THE GIFT THAT YOUR LOVED ONE WAS WHEN THEY WERE

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I AM TRULY GRATEFUL FOR MY INCREDIBLE FRIENDS, FAMILY AND DOCTORS, AND BECAUSE OF THEM, DESPITE WHAT I HAVE GONE THROUGH, I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT I FEEL LIKE THE LUCKIEST, WEALTHIEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

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### BRONWEN GRIFFITHS

It took a number of tests and misdiagnoses before Bronwen discovered that she had a very rare form of cancer, called insulinoma, in 2009. This cancer affects the neuroendocrine system. Several years, two major surgeries, a pancreas and liver resection, numerous courses of experimental chemo (which were unsuccessful) and brand-new forms of radiation treatments later, Bronwen is still fighting hard against her cancer.

"Insulin eats the sugar stored in your body, and in order to survive my disease, I had to constantly eat. At one point I weighed 102kg, which wreaked havoc with my self-esteem," she says.

Bronwen believes the most important factor to keeping up with this constant challenge is that she knows she has something she wants to live for. She refuses to give up without a fight, and says her husband and daughters were, and still are, her reasons for keeping going as hard as she does.

"I think Bronwen tends to forget how inspiring she is, because it has become inherent in her over time to just keep fighting. She forgets how incredibly strong and tenacious she is to be able to do that for so long!" says Yvette, Bronwen's friend of 15 years.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CANDICE ASKHAM



MANDI ALLEN

Mandi was training to be a chef when she discovered the intense control she felt when she made herself sick for the first time. "I cannot tell you the overwhelming sense of relief that flooded my body. It was more than a simple purging of food."

She adds: "This wasn't a necessary compulsion – yet. At 20, I decided to quit smoking – a habit I have had since I was 16. To beat my cravings, I would eat, and then I put on weight. I dieted, but was so hungry I would eat anything I could. I purged to release the guilt. This was the one thing I felt I could control, when I was surrounded by the uncontrollable."

She managed to stop for a number of years. However, in 2012 she started purging sporadically again. "A heavy cold, compounded by asthma and an anxiety attack, resulted in my heart stopping. The doctor said that it was possible that my heart and body have been weakened by years of stress that bingeing and purging had inflicted on it. But it's my crutch; I know it is bad for me and unhealthy. I hate myself for it. I am disgusted. But it's not that easy. I look at myself and I don't like what I see, the person I am."

Again, recently, major stressors and family illness have made the lack of control she has on what is happening around her do the one thing that seems to calm her. But she is trying to stay as strong as she possibly can. "My family and friends have been so supportive and I know they are there to help me, to listen to me," Mandi says.

Kim, Mandi's friend of seven years, says Mandi doesn't realise how truly inspirational, worthy and beautiful she is. "Life sometimes overwhelms us all, but it's people like her that keep us upright and facing forward," says Kim. "Mandi has always been that person for me, and it's my turn to be that person for her now."



IDA SCOTT TAYLOR ONCE SAID:  
 'DO NOT LOOK BACK AND GRIEVE  
 OVER THE PAST, FOR IT IS GONE;  
 AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED ABOUT  
 THE FUTURE, FOR IT HAS YET TO  
 COME. LIVE IN THE PRESENT AND  
 MAKE IT SO BEAUTIFUL THAT IT WILL  
 BE WORTH REMEMBERING.



NATALIE SCHMIDT

When you meet Natalie, you immediately warm to her, a humble woman who doesn't know how inspiring she is to other women who may currently be living through what she managed to walk away from. For 13 years, Natalie was married to a man who physically and emotionally abused her, leaving her a broken woman.

"It was degrading in so many ways. I lost myself and I started to blame myself, thinking I must have done something to deserve the constant abuse and pain," she says.

Natalie explains that, one morning, she woke up and realised that she could no longer allow her husband to continue to do this to her. She found the courage, deep inside, to walk away from the situation she had tried so long to work on and save, a situation she thought she could fix. Instead, she found the strength to realise that she needed to walk away and fix herself.

"For years I put on a mask and hid the truth from the people I loved. Inside, I was a broken woman," she says.

Natalie's sister, Leigh-Ann, says she looks up to her sister, and admires her for all that she has come through. She has remained strong when many people would have found that impossible. "I don't think my sister realises that she is my role-model and someone I look up to," Leigh-Ann says.



Hair makeovers for Courtney and Mandi done by Tanaz Hair Body Nails. @TanazHBN 011 786 2976 Address: 51 Corlett Drive, Illovo

Makeup for Natalie, Courtney, Mandi and Bronwen done by Bobbi Brown South Africa. We were lucky to have Bobbi Brown come on board for this incredible article as an extension of their Pretty Powerful campaign which introduces a limited edition product each year of which every cent made through sales goes towards programs that provide women and girls with the knowledge, skills and experience they need to overcome social inequalities and disadvantages they are facing. www.bobbibrown.co.za @Bobbibrown

Make up for Tsholo and Gani done by Adelle Jung, Red Hot Ops