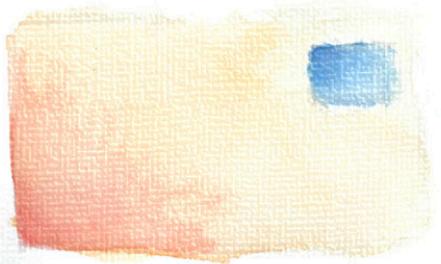
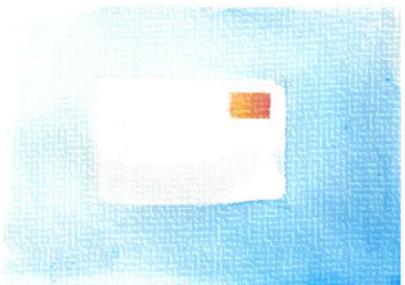
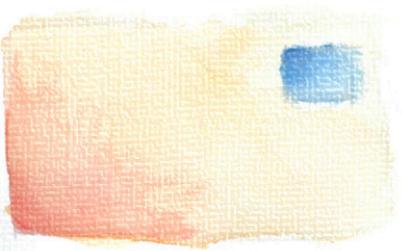


Sometimes I write letters



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Cover Art:

Lucia Veitch

Lucia is a Year 12 student from Ōtepoti / Dunedin who has a strong interest in design, photography and painting. Inspired by an idea floated by the story teller, Lucia responded to “Sometimes I write letters” by drawing on the more ethereal quality of watercolour to similarly float the cover image.

Figure 22. Watercolour envelopes appear to float behind a white page with the title of the narrative Sometimes I write letters, written in Zaphino font, as if carefully hand written.

Sometimes I write letters

Dear Reader,

First of all, I want to let you know that my story talks about hard things, but they are things that are important to say.

I am not impressed with what happened with me, nor am I happy with the actions of my rapists. It has made me very upset and angry. My abusers took advantage of me when I was a child and I lost my innocence because of it. It is unfair how my abusers did this. I was raped several times. I remember, on one occasion, I had gone over to the netball courts and was playing with one of my sisters and a friend. I felt thirsty so I went to get a drink of water. That's when he came up to me and told me we were going for a walk. We went for a long walk through the school, past the park, over the bridge, through the rugby grounds and over a few steps. He then attacked me, making my friend (who he had also taken with us) watch while he raped me. I would have hated to be the person who had to watch.

He was 16 years old and I was only seven. I have had more experiences like this as a child and I am not impressed. In fact, I am quite saddened by how people could choose to hurt other people as a path for life.

There is a part of me that still feels hurt because my Mum and Dad were not able to protect me from my abusers as they didn't see it coming. But I know that it's not their fault. I guess my abusers were good at playing the deception card.

Because of my abuse, I have found it very hard to live and do things that your average person should be able to do like working, going outside of the house alone for a longer time, socialising, and having a stable mood. It's so annoying and frustrating because one day I can be fine and the next I can feel way down. I have had a very unhappy childhood because of my abusers and they have affected my relationships with others and my relationship with my physical

and mental health. I am trying to do my best but I have had many challenges to face over the years because of what happened. I hope that no one who reads this story has the same thing happen to them.

My relationship with the opposite gender has been a struggle. I find it hard to trust men because I worry they might hurt me like my abusers did. That is so annoying too because I want a relationship. I am not really in the space to be with someone right now, but one day I would like to find the right person for me. I would like to have a family and be with someone who makes me feel safe. I would love to be able to be married at one of the Temples of our Church somewhere. I would also love to have children. It would be nice if we were able to live on a farm with animals.

My relationship with God has helped me to keep moving, even though my abusers hurt me. Involving God in my life has made things a lot easier for me. He has been that extra person I am able to turn to when things get tough.

My pets are also God's beautiful creations which have been helpful to me in many, many ways. They have all made me feel better when I felt sad about what my abusers did to me. They have also given me an excuse to go for a walk, distract myself and have given me company when I need it. They have looked after me, helped me feel alright and have given me a reason to not kill myself when I have felt really down. I have always been able to turn to them to feel happier.

It is also good to find things you are good at and that you enjoy. This gives us something to turn to when we are having a hard time – it gives us enjoyment and bridges a gap in our lives. Sometimes those of us who have intellectual disabilities can find relationships get strained very easily. This is because we do not always understand what someone is saying or intending to do with their actions, and if we don't understand, how are we actually supposed to figure it out?

Past hurts have made things difficult for me, but I want you to know that it doesn't have to determine who you are and what happens in your life. I know my story won't be the same as yours. We all have our own battles, feelings and experiences. But here are a few things I have learnt that might help you.

I want you to know that abuse is not your fault and you don't deserve all the pain and hurt. But I know it makes you wonder why me? This can make you feel sick, angry, hurt, lonely, trapped, stuck, unloved and unappreciated. I want you to carry on, keep loving yourself and get good sleep!

Not everyone is happy with the opposite gender and can find it hard to embrace a relationship with the opposite sex. For me, because of my religion I would hope not to ever turn to the same sex or bisexuality. It would shame my parents and my God. I would never want to feel like I had done the wrong thing and turn the opposite to what I have been taught while I was growing up. It's just not for me. But if you want to be in a relationship with someone of the same sex, that's up to you. Just try to be with someone who is from a good background, is trustworthy and safe.

I want you to know that bad mental and physical health isn't your doing, it's just part of life sometimes. But there is a lot you can do to help yourself and get support. Mental and physical health is a part of you and helps to make you who you are. So just try your best to live a life that you are happy with. Being close to your family, pets, and God can help you overcome these things.

When I feel sad, or get reminded about my abusers, I also try and write letters. It helps me to let everything out. It might help you too.