



RUBY

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I was born in Charleville, outback. Dad was an Aboriginal drover, Mum a drover’s cook. When my grandmother died my mum couldn’t look after us and we got put with family or institutions. They wanted to put me in a Down’s Syndrome place because I’m different to everyone else. I was born with brain damage and I can’t remember a lot.

The I ran away when I was 7 or 8 to try and find mum. And I kept running away from welfare families. So I got put in Wilston in the psychiatric ward and Kalimna, The Salvation Army place. But I was in Tufnell first; bad things happened there. They use to come at nighttime to the dorms, take us away and do bad things to us. When I was going to tell on them they said they were going to hurt my brother.

When I was 15 I was taken to a farm to work. I never got paid, just my food. I took off when I was 20 but I got into some trouble. I ended up in the police cells a few times.

I learnt when I was 25 to up and leave if I didn’t like something. I travelled a lot, hitchhiking. I’ve tried to work a lot but nothing has lasted long. I’m on disability now as I broke my back at Wilston. I tried to run away and fell from the roof. The lady there kept kicking me and wouldn’t call the ambulance.

I’ve lived on the streets on and off. When my oldest boy was 13 the Salvation Army didn’t cater for us anymore. So I lived in a toilet in Sandgate with my 2 sons, the dog, the bird. The man used to lock us in for the night so no one could hurt us.

My sons are 23 and 25 now. One’s working and the other one helps look after a friend’s children. I see them on

weekends and whenever I can. I tried the best I could as I didn’t know how to love anyone.

Before Common Ground I lived in a supported place in Highgate Hill where they cook for you, do your washing and everything. My independence was going. I said I was going to take off and live on the streets but the head lady at Micah, Karyn, said don’t you go anywhere yet because there is a building coming up soon. So I waited and waited, and it came.

I’m in my fourth week here. They got me something for my chair to get in easy and it goes straight through the unit onto the balcony. They got me a shower chair too. I love the place, especially when there’s people outside. You can be with people and if you don’t want to be with people you can go in your room and you can’t hear anything at all.

When someone wants to visit you don’t have to let them up as security call you first. And the security card doesn’t let everyone on your floor. I’ve met people and hope to meet more. The building is close to Lotus Place, close to the city, close to Southbank. I go to Lotus every day unless there is something on here at Common Ground like the painting. At Lotus I go on the computers. They set me up on Facebook so I can get my grandson’s photos.

My mum showed me how to defrost a meal and to use the washing machine. They’re going to teach us to cook. They’ve got a pool room and the painting group. My painting from the Lotus painting group was displayed at ‘Art From The Margins’ and someone bought it.

I love it. It’s the best thing they have done. I feel safe.

