



Above from left: Anne Wallace and Sue Treweek.

For the 2013 Archibald Exhibition, Artist Anne Wallace submitted the above portrait of Sue Treweek for a 2013 Archibald Prize. Sue is a Forgotten Australian. She shares her story of growing up in institutionalised care, the trauma she endured and how she has persevered to get to where she is today. Anne shares the impact of first hearing Sue's story and how the trust between these women brought about this powerful portrait.

### **Sue Treweek**

"I felt honoured when Anne said she had wanted to enter a painting in the Archibald for a long time but hadn't found anyone worthy of painting. I didn't know what to say or feel, what would make someone think I'm so special? A lot of good people have helped me along the way, I haven't achieved on my own. Wow! I was so blown away and was expecting a small portrait or something that was distorted but still great - I look at art sometimes and wonder. But it is such an amazing painting and so real, no fake images or distortions. I love it.

Anne was kind about the ageing, but the scars did throw me at first - goes to show that there is pain, but through changes we can learn to live. I didn't really get what the Archibald prize was, I'm not up with the arts and can't draw a straight line. I really like Anne's painting and how she explained it - I don't look defeated and broken, almost stirs the rebelliousness / defiance in me. I've got a picture of me about 3 years after I escaped, I'm hugging a tree,

---

had been surviving out there for ages, from extreme institution to open air. Trees, life, everything was so alive, the stars wow, and smells and the sky, most people couldn't comprehend. It wasn't just the institutional environment like isolation cells and treatment, it was the medication - when I stopped and almost died getting off all that shit it gave me back my ability to feel and sense everything around me. If I hadn't found the bush I would never have made it or remained out of Wolston Park or another institution like jail.

There were a few people who would say hi but mostly everyone saw me as a mental girl. A local elder and her family helped me and two ladies who had also come from Sydney and changed their lives. Then I met Percy (Pop), an old drover bushman who had a house in Coraki. It took a year or so of him saying hi and offering me a cup of tea before I sat on his step and accepted. Pop came and set up my campsite and he offered me a room if I wanted to stay with him, but I was just too messed up to understand he just wanted to help. Eventually I did live with Pop and he taught me how to do everything, shopping... just amazing. He was like a parent, and gee I was bad back then, the rage and night horrors, just so shattered. And here I am lol."

## Anne Wallace

"I'm an artist born and raised in Brisbane and have been painting pictures for the past 23 years. In recent times I've become interested in the history of the treatment of mental illness and in my last exhibition at Darren Knight Gallery in Sydney some of the paintings dealt specifically with psychiatry and psychiatric institutions. That is partly why I found myself listening to a radio show about an exhibition called "Remembering Goodna: Stories from a Queensland Mental Hospital". Speaking were former staff and patients of the psychiatric hospital sometimes called 'Wolston Park' in Brisbane. That is where I first heard about Sue Treweek. As a child Sue experienced neglect and violence at home and was made a ward of the State. The behaviours (such as rocking and self-harm) that are a consequence of trauma were misinterpreted as evidence of mental illness in Sue's case and, after a series of foster homes and children's homes, she was sent to an adult forensic ward at Queensland's longest-running psychiatric hospital and over a number of years was subjected to ECT, strong psychotropic drugs, confinement and physical and sexual abuse. She was deprived of an education, freedom, the opportunities and happiness that should be a child's right. She also witnessed the horrific treatment of other vulnerable children and adults and the general culture of an institution described by a psychiatrist who worked there as a "whole universe of wrongness". I was astounded to learn that this kind of thing happened as recently as the 1980s. Unlike Sue, I had every advantage in life and yet I could not say with any certainty that I would have had the mental strength to survive such a trial by fire.

But Sue is living proof that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. She eventually escaped Wolston by running away and slowly built a life through her own innate resourcefulness and determination to prove that, once off the drugs used to control her, she was as capable as any of living a full and productive life. When she first ran away she went off into the bush and that is why I have painted her surrounded by the flora and fauna of Queensland - the highly poisonous 'Angels Trumpets' or Datura flowers (that we warn our children not to touch) that shelter her, are a safer haven than the 'asylum'. She is now an advocate for other survivors of the shameful system that put children in the 'too hard basket' into adult psychiatric institutions. She speaks for those vulnerable amongst us who have no voice and, in my opinion, is a living legend. I was privileged that Sue trusted me with her story enough to be happy for me to paint a picture of her. I don't feel that this is the end of what I would like to do about this subject and now that I have met some of the other women who've had similar experiences to Sue, I would like to make some more paintings so as to increase the visibility of this part of our history."

