

JACOB

My mob is home. They know me, see me for me. I may have hurt them in the past but they're the only ones who will be there for me in the end.

I used to get really violent and then black out and that. Usually once or twice a week, mostly because of alcohol and drugs. Didn't worry me. My family said I had anger issues and needed to learn how to control myself. I was 17 when I was diagnosed with a mental disorder. I'm 27 now and been on and off my meds. Sometimes it's hard to keep up with them all, I'd rather not say what meds they are. I honestly can't remember most of the names of 'em! But when it did hit me that I had a mental illness, I got real depressed. I tried to harm myself a couple of times in different ways too. Stupid shit ya know? Pills, alcohol, reckless behaviour ... I felt like my life was worthless and I'd never be able to live a normal and healthy one. I lashed out at my family, blaming them for my own mistakes. I even began to lash out at my own culture because of the stigma us mob get placed with, ay. I just wanted it all to end, the negativity and that.

It was hard enough being a young black male, where stereotypes that want you to fail already taint your own desires of being somebody. I'm a blackfella and proud too. I try not to think negative though anymore, it gets me down and sometimes even wild. I got ripped for all the bad shit I did by family and had to earn that respect back. Of course, they didn't know it was this thing in me that was causing most of my issues. At the time all the voices in my head were betraying me, telling me I'm nothing, just a down and out black who is like the rest. Society can do that to you though—they stereotype us, especially when you try living by your own cultural protocols and lore. Keeping a balance is harder than it looks. Most of us lose our way because of it; we live in two worlds of expectations. We cop the black politics among our own and the white politics that are forced upon us. Sorry for gettin' all political ay, I tend to do that when I'm anxious! I get anxiety sometimes and forget the point.

I am on my meds still, for my anxiety, anger, and my mind; there are a few that I think I'd have to get back to ya on, ay. These days I have regular check-ups and the family tries to keep me in line too. If I didn't have them, I'd be no one. That's the best thing about being a blackfella—no matter what you do or how fucked up your life may get you will always have your people, your home.

I can always say I am Jacob and I'm from the Yorta-Yorta mob and that. When you take a blackfella away from that and incarcerate them or lock them up in a rehab or clinic that's when you're nobody and things become harder to handle. A long time away from home can make you lonely. People think that all that stuff that happened in the past was then and we should move on. They miss the point altogether, it is because of the past most of us have issues living in society even functioning normal in a way that they see fit today. It still affects every generation like a cycle but we all handle it in our own way.



FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

KATHRINE CLARKE

When I see people with tattoos on their forearms I can't help but wonder if they are hiding a scar too. Or when people cover their forearms with scarves, wristbands and sleeves, are they too covering a past they wish to forget?

When I look at my left forearm, I see a past that cannot be erased.

Growing up, I became quite familiar with bullies and the harm they can do to someone. Because of this, my father wanted me to do self-defence classes. Judo was his answer—'a grappling martial art where the strength of your grip relies solely on the strength of your forearms'. I quickly learnt that the stronger my forearm, the greater the advantage over my opponent.

But that was then. Nowadays I avoid looking at it. Beneath the caramel complexion of my skin, my forearm feels like it's an open wound.

I still remember the first time I sliced my forearm; the cold steel of the tweezers—yes tweezers, I couldn't even find the guts to use a razor. One slice left only a faint red mark. I knew if I was going to do it right I should slice downwards, but I didn't really have any intention of taking my own life. I was numb and determined to feel something. I went to do it again, positioning the tip of the steel on a slant, and this time the blood oozed out. My forearm stung as I let the tears roll down my cheeks, and I smiled. Was I twisted or wicked for smiling like this? My parents and younger brother popped into my head—what would they think? I was ashamed because I enjoyed the feeling; I was obsessed with the way the dark red liquid flowed down my forearm, my eyes fixated on it.

It eased my pain and numbness, but on the other hand it made me angry, knowing instantly what I had done was wrong. Cutting yourself was taboo, mainly because