

SOUL REFRACTION



PAUL R KOHN

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DEDICATION

This is for everyone who has ever felt unseen, unheard, lost or broken, either now or at any point in their life.

This is for the people who believe in me and support me each and every day.

This is for the people who support the words I share, both written and spoken, online, live, and now here in these pages.

This is for the people who believed in me who are no longer here, either by choice or not...

I truly value, appreciate, love you all, and will hold space for you forever.

I am always, always here, and I hope that my words touch you, support you, help your soul to find understanding, to heal, to grow, to soar.

PROLOGUE

Life is a journey... A trajectory of ups and downs, lefts and rights, light and dark. A soul refraction...

Soul Refraction is those moments we are consumed with dark feelings... Hurt, shame, guilt... It's the moments that we are broken, vulnerable, exposed, alone, invisible. And it's the things we do both in and out of those moments to survive, the way we reflect, repair, rebuild, regrow to turn it around, shine a light in the darkness to help ourselves and others. Light ourselves up and, in doing so, light up the world to show that these things can be overcome. That we can survive, heal, grow, and positively impact the body, mind, heart, soul and spirit of ourselves, and in doing so, positively impact others too.

To help every soul to shine, to soar.

There have been so many experiences I have gone through, endured, most of which I ignored for a long time... Until I went through something that dragged everything up from the trenches. Something that broke me in ways I never imagined I could break. It showed me the best and worst of myself and others. It showed me my own shortcomings, the stigma and isolation of mental illness as I navigated PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and MDD (Major Depressive Disorder), and the shortcomings of the mental health care system.

It has been the hardest and loneliest journey I have ever embarked on. It nearly broke me beyond repair. Nearly...

But it didn't.

I faced my demons head on and survived. Something I never take for granted.

I am torn apart by wounds and bruises, held together by scars and stitches, but despite everything, I am uniquely me. And I share my journey in the hope that it helps someone, saves someone, gives someone a new perspective. I shine my light in the darkness so others feel seen, heard, understood, and know that they are not alone, know that they too have power even when they feel powerless.

And that's why I write and share poetry.

Because even in commonality, we each have our own unique story.

Because each of us are a unique work of art!

1 - SOUL BREAK

“Trauma is a relentless beast with sharp claws that tears at your heart and soul, with fangs that constantly gnaw on your mind.”

POET OR POETRY

Hello. My name's Paul, and this is my artist statement...

Kind of...

Not really...

It'll have to do.

I am a poet. At least, I call myself one.

It's like an alcoholic, except I consume an excess of words, of ideas, of thoughts, of emotions, only to reach my tipping point and regurgitate them out onto the page through my hand with a pen.

Hopefully in a way that makes sense to me, hopefully in a way that makes sense to you, hopefully in a way that helps someone, saves someone!

I seek to learn from every encounter and experience in my life, good or bad.

From the time I was born, to the moment I find myself in now. Like the time I played a piano and was good at it, to the time I played a guitar and was okay at that too. If an instrument has strings, I'll try and play it, and I'll probably sing along too.

Like the time I wrote poems and called them lyrics, to the time I wrote lyrics and called it poetry.

Like the time I was glassed and bled shards from my back, stitched myself with sticky tape and bandaged myself, burying the superficial wounds and the emotional wounds all at once.

To the time I was mugged and left in the gutter unconscious, battered, and bruised. Crying out in pain, in shame, in the relentlessness of all that surfaced. Only to be made mute, left broken, discarded, alone, empty.

Learning that each and every scar, whether seen or not, has a story to tell.

Often more than one story.

And each and every story I have to tell, I turn into art to help others feel seen and heard.

Because I know firsthand what it's like to not be.

Because in my darkest moments, I know firsthand what it's like to feel abandoned, worthless, invisible.

And that's why I write poetry...

So, on reflection...

Hello. My name is Paul, and I thought I was a poet, but now I realise I am the poem itself.

TRAUMA

My feet drag as I walk the many, many miles alone. My tongue trails along behind, like a dead weight. Its ability to speak and be truly heard taken away through silence and exhaustion, judgement and shame.

Any sense of worth I had at this time of worthlessness disappears in a heartbeat, taken away right when I needed to grasp it with all that I am.

Brutal experiences, both new and old, have caused a trauma and depression in me like I have never felt or spiralled down before, bringing me closer to the edge than I have ever, ever been. And in that, I have held on too tightly to the only people in my life who are right and true and real; my reactions to my own triggers ultimately hurting them, triggering them... I will never forgive myself for this, for I never wanted to hurt them... And this knowing that I have further affects my reactions, adds to my triggers, feeds my trauma...

But that's the thing with trauma; it's so misunderstood... Parts of your brain that just never should switch off shut down completely, and the parts that should be mostly silent become loudly hyperactive and kick everything up a notch, taking away your control, your rationale.

My psych draws a picture of an oversized baked bean on an orange piece of paper and says it's my brain. She draws three more circles inside, crosses two out, and explains what is working and what isn't; why I am reacting to triggers like I am and why I am powerless to stop it.

She says none of this is my fault.

I say, “Thanks...”

But it all feels like my fault, just the same.

I cry; harder than I have ever cried in my life. The brutality of recent experiences and the surfacing of old ones has been hard enough to handle. I have lost so much as I’ve spiralled. But, in this moment, to come to the realisation I have hurt the most important people in my life is more confronting and painful than any of it!

I tell my psych this, and she gives me a couple of strategies to try and keep my reactions in control when I feel triggered; I try them, and they work, but at the same time, they internalise everything even more, and so while I don’t react outwardly when triggered, internally I am more broken than ever; a babbling tearful mess when alone. Carrying a mind that is never quiet, a heart that is broken, a soul that is crushed.

And I am alone a lot, for it is not only the most important people in my life I have inadvertently hurt and unintentionally pushed away but other friends and family too...
Because I have held on too tightly or shut down too hard...

Because I’ve been too much or not enough...

[cont...]

Trauma is not something to be taken lightly. Trauma is misunderstood in so many ways, even by those who have experienced it before. Trauma hits and affects everyone differently. Trauma does not always instantly reveal how it is going to impact you. Trauma is a relentless beast with sharp claws that tears at your heart and soul, with fangs that constantly gnaw on your mind. Trauma, indeed, any mental health condition, can't be seen like a physical injury. It's not something that is easily recognised, and because of this, people blame you or turn away and abandon you instead of showing compassion and understanding, the cost of which is far greater than anyone can imagine to the person experiencing trauma.

And right when you need someone, through your own actions and reactions, you push them away harder in order to protect them. Or so you think.

It is a lonely, lonely place to be and one that can potentially cost you your life...

Not going to lie; it nearly cost me mine, but I was lucky. I can't explain how or why, but despite having pushed people away, they were holding me and protecting me that fateful night... Their souled presence physically saved me in a way I can't explain and filled me with the determination I needed to push on, to heal, to grow. Their souled presence, their voice, showed me that I am worth it.

I AM WORTH IT!

CASCADING SLEEPLESSNESS

I lay awake staring at the ceiling,
watching my thoughts play out before my eyes.
The scene so vivid I could reach out and touch it.
Is it real or is it just a dream?

The silent movie I see above me,
keeps me on edge; what will happen next?
As sleep evades me once again,
I lay awake staring at the ceiling.

So vivid, it's like I'm actually moving,
walking, running from those things chasing me.
But it's pitch black around me, silent as I stare above,
watching my thoughts play out before my eyes.

I stumble, I fall; startled, my body shakes,
feels like the ground is actually scratching me.
I see a tree, crawl towards it to help me rise up,
the scene so vivid I could reach out and touch it.

Awake or asleep, I can no longer tell,
the cold sweat, the darkness, the silence feels like hell.
The exhaustion I feel, so heavy I can't move.
Is it real or is it just a dream?

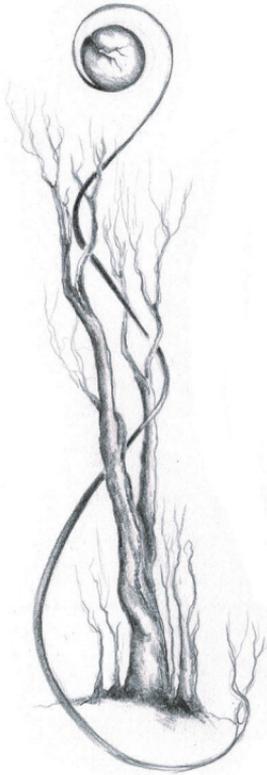
FOREST

When a tree falls in the forest, does anyone hear it scream?

Or is it silenced just like me in my time of need?

Pointing to the sky until it can reach the sun no more,
crying out, cracking, as it falls to the forest floor.

See, in trauma I'm no different to that falling tree,
cos in this people forest, I am only heard by me.



SLEEP-WAKING

I cannot sleep, I cannot wake.

So I lay here wide asleep

dreaming only in black

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

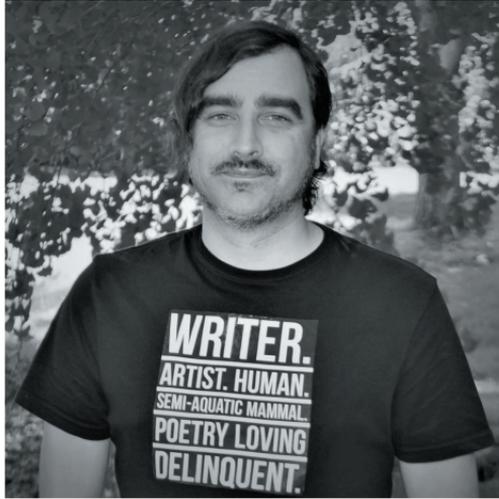
Paul R Kohn is a writer of poetry and short stories, performer of spoken word, and creator of music and lyrics.

Residing in South Australia, he has featured at The Festival of Now, Mixed Bag Poetry, Spoke N Slurred and The Good Word in Adelaide, West Side Slam in NSW, Perth Poetry Club in WA, Alternator Poetry in the Gold Coast, and performs regularly at open mics live in Adelaide and online, both nationally and internationally.

Most recently placing third at the 2021 Spoken Word SA Winter Slam, he placed first at the April 2021 West Side Slam online in Sydney and first in the July 2020 Ruckus Monthly Online Video Slam in Brisbane.

His work has been published in *Calling Up the Day* (PatP Anthology, 2022), *Joined Up Writing – Three Fall, Take Heart* (PatP Anthology, 2021), RDW World, *Anti Heroin Chic* and *Black Bough Poetry*, and his work has been shared by ByMePoetryAus, UntwineMe Australia and Cooee Poetry, to name a few. His written words also won him first place in World of Poetry's 1K Instagram competition in Dec 2021.

Paul writes as a way of processing, understanding, healing and growing, and shares his written and spoken word poetry all over Australia and the world in the hope that it helps others too.



You can find Paul R Kohn on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube and Soundcloud.
For details, check out Paul's website at:

<https://paulrkohn.wordpress.com/about/>

*Sunset,
the dawn of my darkness.
Sunrise,
the eve of my new light.
Darkness to light.
Soul Refraction.*

This book is a journey of moments in time displayed in prose, in lyrics, in poems. Raw yet captivating, confronting yet uplifting, powerful, passionate, relatable and thought-provoking, this book takes the reader, and their heart and soul, on a journey from breaking to healing, growing to soaring.

Because life is a journey... A trajectory of ups and downs, lefts and rights, light and dark...

A soul refraction...

