



*'I open my eyes' — by  
Bernie Turnbull*

## I open my eyes – by Bernie Turnbull

I close my eyes and I'm 19 again. I hate my life. Living in a dingy granny flat, sleeping on a foam pull-out mattress. No money, no friends, and a job I detest. I'm overweight, smoke too much and drink too much. I can't escape this darkness and I am falling deeper into despair. Impending doom every day, as I wake to feelings of wishing I did not wake at all. I am pregnant for the first time, after suffering many years of sexual abuse. "You can't have it", my cheating, lying boyfriend demands. He tells me to take care of it and that he won't be at my side. I feel relieved knowing this is what I want. I am definitely not ready to have a child. I go to my family doctor to confirm my pregnancy, who shames me for having sex before marriage. Family Planning is where I go next, and they suggest Children by Choice. This is where I find you. You, the stranger from the purple house of love, you show me the compassion and understanding that I needed to survive. You are the kind-hearted counsellor who opened my eyes and gave me the strength to fight off the haters. The haters holding their placards of murder and screaming lies at us, even though they claim God loves all his children. They don't care it was rape and abuse by one of their own that brought me here. They don't care that I used to be one of them, only now I am on the other side. I turn away from the women in my family, as I know they would not be on my side. I hold my head high, as I walk into the abortion clinic, where another caring stranger looks me in the eyes and gently explains it will all be over soon. This is hell for me, and this doctor knows what must be done. He takes this part of my body, where love is not growing. I choose to fight for the life I might still have one day, and the dark clouds clear in my head.

I close my eyes and I'm almost 40. I love my life. Living in a beautiful house, with a nice veggie garden out the back. I have financial security, plenty of friends and an amazing job. I am fit and healthy from my bushwalking & playing sport. My days are filled with joy, as I wake to feelings of positivity to what this day could bring. I am pregnant again, after suffering many years of pain and loss. We are desperate to have this child. At our 12-week scan, we hope for an outcome that we have wanted for so long. Again, it is not to be, and the day turns into a river of tears. The doctor explains that the baby has Edwards Syndrome and will not survive long after birth. "We can choose to terminate the pregnancy", my loyal and kind husband suggests. We hold each other tight knowing this is what we both want. The public hospital is where I go next. This is where I find you. You, the stranger from the nursing team, who shows me the compassion and understanding that I need to get through. You are the kind-hearted nurse who gently explains, I will have to wait a week or two for the procedure. I turn away from the women in my family, as I find more comfort from this female stranger, just as I did all those years ago. My wonderful nurse at the hospital phones me almost every day, to check on how I'm coping. The day of my termination, I have found the strength to get through with the love of my husband, as this is *our* pain. Outside the hospital there are no people holding placards of murder around to scream their lies at us. We are safe from the haters. I hold my head high, as I walk into the hospital clinic where another caring stranger looks me in the eyes and gently explains it will all be over soon. This part of my body, where love has grown, but love is not enough. I choose to be relieved of my pain and I know that rainbows can come after the storm.

My eyes are open on this day in 2022. I look around and see my beautiful family. My adoring husband of 20 years and the son I thought I'd never have. All the love surrounding me, that I am grateful for every second of every single day. I found my rainbow. How do I ever thank you, the counsellor from the purple house? How do I ever thank you, the nurse from the hospital? How do I ever thank ALL the people who got me through my life? If I tell my story, perhaps this is a start....

