

FREE March - May 2016

# RISE

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Broken and Beautiful by Kylie Brice

## Khadija Gbla:

a story of courage, hope and the power of transforming love

by Wendy Rush

Uniting Women Edition

[risemagazine.com.au](http://risemagazine.com.au)

#### Publisher

RISE Publications  
ABN 57990 031 173  
risemagazine.com.au

**RISE Magazine shares good news stories with a South Australian flavour and a Christian perspective**

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ADVERTISING DEADLINE FOR JUNE 2016 EDITION:  
10 MAY 2016

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**Printed by** JOiE Creative  
ISSN 1839-8057

#### Acknowledgements

RISE Magazine acknowledges our partners CBMC International SA Inc and Koorong, where the magazine is available free of charge, and also thanks our other supporters including distributors, advertisers and those whose prayers have helped to realise the vision. Special thanks to our friends at Two Fish Media and Joie Creative.

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**Cover:** Khadija Gbla, Young South Australian of the Year 2011, uses the trauma of her past to help others



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Hear more from Kylie at Uniting Women Conference [unitingwomen.org.au](http://unitingwomen.org.au)

To find out more about Kylie's music, download free audio or order your copy of 'Broken and Beautiful' go to [kyliebricemusic.com](http://kyliebricemusic.com)



Kylie Brice:

# Broken and Beautiful

*Adelaide singer and songwriter Kylie Brice shares her very personal journey and explains why music is an essential part of who she is.*

Music has always played an important role in my life. I started regularly writing songs when I was in my early teens, but I was very self-conscious about my voice so I rarely sang my songs to anybody else.

It wasn't until I was in my early twenties when I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and depression that I really discovered how important music and song writing was to me. Song writing was my 'safe place' where I could say my thoughts out loud and say how I really felt about things without fear of judgement. It remained a very private part of my life, I didn't share my songs with others as it was purely for me and my own therapy.

I would put on this brave face for the world, and smile and say I was okay. Then I would go home and pour out how lost, scared and hopeless I really felt. Song writing really helped me though, simply knowing I had an outlet and a safe place to express myself.

I struggled a lot with sleep, and would spend hours and hours late at night in the church hall, next door to our house, playing the piano and literally crying out the anxious thoughts that were keeping me awake. I would keep going until I had nothing left in me, when my brain had slowed down enough so I could go home and finally sleep. It felt like I

had done something 'productive' with all the thoughts and fears I had, I didn't need to keep going over them in my head, they were out, and often down on paper.

A few years later I married and my husband and I started a family. I was completely swept up in our son's world and couldn't have been happier. But I got to a point where I was feeling completely burnt out and I didn't understand why. All I ever wanted was to be a wife and mum – why was I feeling this emptiness? I thought I had risen above my valleys! I spent some time with my guitar and wrote a song called "Recharge", and realised what was missing was my music. There is nothing else I do that can recharge me like song writing does.

Slowly I started saying yes to opportunities to share my music, I started connecting with other musicians and even formed a band. I decided that I really wanted to pursue a music career. I knew that meant getting over my insecurities about my voice. I connected with a great mentor and a vocal teacher who both really helped me to develop confidence in myself and work on the areas I struggled with.

The more I shared my music, the more I experienced others connecting with my story and thanking me for my honesty and vulnerability. I decided that I was really going to go for it. My background is in community services, disability work, school chaplaincy, so I really wanted to knuckle down and find a way to combine my passion for people and music to make a positive impact on others. Particularly for young women and mothers.

As well as performing my music, I am now running creative expression and song writing workshops; leading sessions for parents on the importance of music on children's development; and making guest artist and speaker appearances at self-care and mental wellness events.

I had previously thought my song writing was a gift given just to me to help me through some tough times and never expected anything more to come from it. However, I discovered that not only does my music uplift others, it is actually an important part of my own journey and healing. When I can connect my story with others through music I better understand myself, my past, my present and my future. It really is a gift that keeps on giving.

I am really excited about being part of the Uniting Women Conference. I'll be presenting a song writing workshop. The theme of the conference is "Sharing Stories of Hope" so I am going to be sharing my story through anxiety; depression; self-care and motherhood and the vital role that song writing and creativity has had, and continues to have on my well-being.

We'll explore the art of story-telling through song. I'll share tips on ways to connect our stories through the creative spirit of music. I really want to encourage women to value themselves and the unique gifts each of us have to offer and to learn sustainable ways to be generous to ourselves and others.

My debut EP is called "Broken and Beautiful". The theme and image I have worked around is that of "Kintsugi" the Japanese art form of repairing pottery with liquid gold. The piece is believed to be more beautiful having been broken. The songs I have written and recorded on the EP reflect my heart of being honest about my brokenness and not letting my weaknesses stop me from living the beautiful life I've been given and called to live. I openly share my journey in the hope that others will have the courage to embrace and share their own. Life can come from darkness and beauty can come from brokenness.

*Read a review of Kylie's EP 'Broken and Beautiful' in this issue of RISE magazine.*



*Interview by Belinda Taylor.  
Article by Wendy Rush.*

Khadija Gbla was born in Sierra Leone in West Africa. When she was 10 years old she and her family fled civil war, heading north to Gambia where they lived for three years. It was here that the family applied for refugee status and began their long journey to Adelaide, South Australia.

“Most people don’t understand the process you have to go through to become a refugee” says Khadija. “You have to apply for refugee status, which we did. We had to share our stories of the war and explain what happened to us. My grandfather was a chief and he was politically involved so we were targeted.

“We were called for an interview, then called back for a second interview. We had a medical to make sure we were healthy and I guess to make sure we didn’t bring anything contagious with us. One day we were told ‘you are going to Australia’. We didn’t choose where we were going – it could have been Canada or the US. Australia chose us essentially.

“We didn’t know where Australia was in the world, we’d never heard of it. A few people said that it was at the other end of the world, there was nowhere else to go after that. That was quite a scary way to look at it, but we were just so grateful to have been chosen.”

After three days of travelling Khadija and her family finally arrived in their new country.

“There was no feeling like it when we got off that plane. There are no words to describe the joy. This was going to be our new home. We were coming to a better life. We had been through hell and now we were going to heaven. That’s how it felt.

“At that time kids my age – I had just turned 13 – were getting married to men who already had two or three wives. Kids my age were dying – getting shot and killed, getting raped, getting sold into slavery. And here I was - safe.”



# KHADIJA GBLA:

Khadija Gbla has experienced the horror of civil war, the danger and uncertainty of fleeing her homeland as a refugee, and the pain and trauma of female genital mutilation. But for this remarkable young woman her pain is now her purpose as she works towards helping and protecting others. This article includes a description of female genital mutilation (FGM).

## JOURNEY THROUGH HELL

While they were going through the refugee assessment process in Gambia, Khadija's mother came home one day and told the children they were going on a little holiday. It sounded strange to Khadija but she knew not to question her mother. They drove for hours until they reached a village, where they stopped near a hut. A lady came out of the hut, had a conversation with Khadija's mother, then went back into the hut and came out again with what Khadija describes as a 'rusty orange, yellow looking knife'.

"That scared me, but what scared me most was the lack of understanding about why we were there. The lady was old and dressed very traditionally which in our culture always symbolises something. She went into a second hut and my Mum dragged me along."

Khadija's clothes were removed and she was held down on the floor.

"This old lady came towards me with the knife and I thought she was going to kill me. The next thing I knew she was holding what I now know to be my clitoris. She started cutting away and it seemed to take forever. It felt like a lifetime to me lying there – fighting my Mum off, screaming, passing out, waking up, passing out. Then she stopped and she threw the flesh away as if it was the most disgusting thing she had ever seen."

The old woman with the rusty knife had performed female genital mutilation (FGM) by cutting off Khadija's clitoris and labia majora, the outer lips of her vulva.

"I just lay there, bleeding, confused and thinking 'what the hell just happened'?"

Khadija spent weeks recuperating. There was no explanation, just pain, trauma and

confusion. Not long after that, she and her family arrived in Australia.

## THE THREAT OF FGM IN AUSTRALIA

Khadija points out that many people from communities that practice FGM – mainly Africa, the Middle East and Asia - now live in Australia. It's natural for people to bring their own culture and beliefs to a new country, says Khadija, and this includes many healthy and positive things.

"And then there is the negative, which is what FGM is. They are continuing to practice it because to them it's part of their culture. We have kids that are being taken back to their country of origin to have FGM done to them. Malaysia and Indonesia, our neighbours, have legalised FGM so you just have to walk into a clinic. Or you can get a woman (called cutters) to come to Australia and do it to our girls here. We even know of women in Australia who are doing it.

"For years people thought the war against FGM was something that was far away in a remote place across the other side of the world. We felt sorry for everybody there, but it wasn't something we had to deal with. The reality is that the fight against FGM is actually right here now, in our own backyard and it's happening to girls at any age from birth. They are in our schools, they are your neighbours, they are in the playground."

According to Khadija those who support the practice hide behind cultural relativity. "People have a right to practice their culture until they are committing a criminal act, which FGM is. It is illegal in every State in Australia. Your culture should not be a defence to a crime.

"Culture is good when it is positive. Culture

is not good when it's breaking the law. Culturally I'm African, I am as African as you can get - I'm loud, I'm vibrant, I'm colourful! But I refuse to accept a certain aspect of my culture that I think is terrible. My fight against FGM is not about attacking my own culture or my own people. This is about human lives. Every child, no matter their religious background or ethnicity, should be afforded the exact same protection."

Khadija established the not for profit organisation No FGM Australia out of concern that enough wasn't being done to deal with the issue in this country. Most of the work that has been done is around women's health and community education, but, according to Khadija, there was a huge gap in the area of child protection.

"FGM is child abuse. That's how it should be spoken about, that's how it should be treated. Those who are notifiers should be advised that this is child abuse, how to recognise it and who to call if they're worried about it."

In addition to child protection, No FGM Australia also aims to support and empower survivors. "There are a huge number of women who come to Australia and, like me, have survived FGM already and then we go through health side effects."

Those side effects include very heavy and painful periods, fibroids and infertility. "Every time I have a period I have to be admitted to hospital to have morphine shots because that's how bad the level of pain is. And I was told I wouldn't be able to have kids.

"So we are supporting women with these side effects, advocating for them in the health system which is not well adapted to deal with FGM survivors and the consequences of FGM. We give the women

# A STORY OF COURAGE, HOPE AND THE POWER OF TRANSFORMING LOVE





Bio: Khadija Gbla has been recognised for her ability to influence community change and raise awareness, particularly around multicultural and gender issues. She is especially noted for her honest and passionate 2014 TED Talk addressing female genital mutilation. Her impressive list of awards includes Young South Australian of the Year 2011 and The Advertiser South Australia's 50 most Influential Women 2014.

the skills to do whatever they want to do with their experience, and we support them in speaking to their community and starting those conversations."

Another vitally important aspect of No FGM Australia's work is professional development - educating teachers, doctors, nurses and others in the community. Their comprehensive website includes information specific to each of the occupations or professions who are most likely to come into contact with survivors or those at risk.

## LITTLE GIRLS AT RISK OF FGM

Khadija explains how to recognise a child who is at risk of FGM. "If they come from a community that practices FGM, if their mother has had FGM, if their siblings have had FGM, then they are at high risk. If they tell you they are going back home for a special event, they are going to be a woman, that female family members are coming from overseas for a visit and something wonderful is going to happen, then that can give you a sense that something's about to go down.

"We want people to make those notifications. It's not about taking the children away – that's the last resort. It's about explaining to the family that the practice is harmful and illegal. The next

possible step is a child protection order which stops the family taking the child interstate or overseas. It could also include a regular check-up of that child in a safe way, which is one of the biggest deterrents. What we believe in Australia is that protection of a child is paramount to any other consideration. It is not about demonising those cultures. We have seen three girls a day at risk of FGM. This is about those kids.

"Imagine a 4 or 5 year old being held down and having their private parts mutilated. We need to focus on protecting those little girls, who deserve to grow up to be healthy. And we can go about this in a very culturally appropriate way."

Khadija makes it clear that female genital mutilation – FGM – is everybody's responsibility and all Australians should know about it. "Just like we all know about child abuse, rape, sexual assault, paedophilia and domestic violence. We need people in the community to stand up. We need the fathers to say 'no' to FGM, we need the mothers to say 'no' to FGM, we need all the siblings to say 'no'. And all of us need to be protectors of those little girls in the same way we say no to other forms of child abuse."

No FGM Australia has set up the first FGM hotline in Australia for workers, professionals

and community members who want to talk about a situation and seek advice.

"Is there a child at risk? A chance this is going to happen? Let's take action before it's too late. Because one chance is all we get!"

## LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Khadija has been advocating against FGM since her own experience at 13 years old. She was born into a Muslim family. "I spent most of my life being a Muslim, praying five times a day, fasting, being told everything I am is because of Allah."

But about three years ago Khadija's life began to take a different turn. A new member of their community, a pastor who had started the first African Christian church in Adelaide, invited her family along to a church service.

"My mother is very liberal in that we don't see religion as a source of conflict or point of difference. We believed that Christianity and Islam were the same, they just have different names for the same god. So Fridays we went to the mosque and Sundays we went to church and we became what I call 'Chris-Mus' (Christian-Muslims).

"I will never forget my first visit to church,



“AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.”

it was really weird. We didn't have to fully cover up, we did a lot of singing – I love that because I love singing and dancing – there was a scripture reading, then the pastor started preaching. What I got from the message was that Christianity is about love. And the head of Christianity was this man Jesus, the son of God. This Supreme Being loved us so much he thought 'how can I reach my children? How can I show them the essence of who I am, because I'm too big for them to even comprehend?' So he sent his son Jesus, who is God, to relate to us.

"And it was this unconditional love, that no matter what I do I'm loved; and the grace - when I fail or do the wrong thing I'll be forgiven. As a Muslim what I understood was Allah's love wasn't unconditional. If I did something wrong I would have to repent but, for me, there was no sense of grace or forgiveness, no sense that it's finished. I became disconnected with my Muslim faith and I felt that it was based on fear, not love.

"As a Muslim I prayed five times a day in another language. But as a Christian I can pray in any language I want in any way I want. Sitting in that church and hearing this man preaching about this unconditional love, I just thought 'wow - sign me up!'"

Khadija and her family still went to the mosque, still fasted when it was Ramadan but slowly, as time went on, she carried the Bible in her handbag instead of the Koran. She continued being a 'Chris-Mus' but, she explains, she was leaning towards Christianity.

Khadija married but found herself in an abusive relationship which lasted seven years. "Due to my lack of self-worth and my low self-esteem I thought I was going to get love from this person who was just as equally broken as me. He assaulted me numerous times and after the last assault I was lying in hospital thinking 'I'm gonna die next time'. There were numerous times over my lifetime where I tried to kill myself. I had been depressed and had had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But lying there, realising somebody was going to take my life, it made no sense."

It was at that moment she knew she had to leave. Not long after she left the hospital a friend asked her to go to church. Khadija was homeless and life was not going well.

"So I went to church. That feeling came back - I'm home, I'm feeling at peace. I kept going back. Some of my physical symptoms of pain started healing slowly and the pain I felt inside my heart started easing the more I learned of God's love again, of his forgiveness, of who I am in Christ – I'm a queen, a child of God, I am precious, I am beautiful.

"I am happy to tell you that that man who was the pastor at the first church I went to became my husband." And happily Khadija and her husband now have a child she thought she would never be able to conceive.

"I am still a new Christian and I don't go around shouting my Christianity. I always come back to what Christianity is to me – it is about love. The Bible says that this is above all else. When I gave birth to my son what was so amazing for me was that it actually made me see my relationship with God. My son depends on me for absolutely everything. God requires that I have the same dependency on him. When my son holds me he doesn't clutch in fear, he's always relaxed in my arms. Absolute trust and faith. It reminds me that this is something God needs from me. My son in a way has simplified something that I struggled with as a Christian.

"Jesus loves me in all my imperfection, every single second of the day. It's that love that helps me want to fight the battles that I fight – racism, FGM, violence against women. There is no other word for my Christian faith – it's love. When I have a difference of opinion with someone it doesn't mean I don't love them. If someone is living contrary to what the Bible says, it doesn't matter, I love them. It was love that connected me to Jesus. And it was his love that I felt consume me. It's the same love that I hope, by my very existence, in my own way, I'm giving back – I'm giving love.

"When I became a Christian one of the things that was very profound was that I recognised God's grace and God's calling through those times when I wasn't a Christian. Everything I have done – speaking out, standing up - that was a calling that I was answering without being conscious that I was doing it. Jesus had called me to share my experience, to share my pain, to share my gift. Then when I became a Christian I was consciously doing it, not unconsciously. "

Khadija's favourite Bible verse is Romans 8:28 (NIV) *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

"Nothing gives me more hope. Do you not need to know all things will work out? No matter what your challenges are, even though they're meant to break you or crack you or destroy you, it will work out. My FGM was meant to make me not feel like a woman, to take my sexuality away. My domestic violence was meant to make me feel worthless, powerless. But how wonderful that I'm able to stand up every single day in front of people – and when I do there is always a man or woman who connects with me, there is always somebody that it brings hope to.

"All of that pain has become my purpose. Everything was meant to break me, everything was meant to make me infertile but here I am, my baby's just turned one and I'm able to share that story.

"I look at my son every single day. He represents God's love, God's mercy, God's grace and God's fulfilment of his promises. God says our lives should be testimonies. I would say my life is a testimony because of God's grace. "

*Hear more from Khadija at Uniting Women Conference [unitingwomen.org.au](http://unitingwomen.org.au)*

*Read about Khadija and the work that No FGM Australia does at [nofgm.org](http://nofgm.org)*



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# Sharing Hope and Uniting Women

*Interview by Belinda Taylor.  
Article by Wendy Rush.*

*Deidre Palmer is the organiser of Uniting Women Sharing Stories of Hope 2016. After attending the sold out Uniting Women conference in Sydney in 2014 she was keen to give South Australian women access to this national event. Only the fifth Uniting Women conference held since the 1990s, and only the second in Adelaide, Deidre explains why holding it in SA is so important.*

“Women in the church are engaging in amazing ministry within congregations and in their working lives. They are witnessing to the hope of the gospel in the areas of public health and education, in raising families, and in building relationships in neighbourhoods. I think this conference can encourage women in what they’re already engaged in and network them so they can support one another to further the work that they’re already doing. It gives them the opportunity to hear stories of hope from women from all over the country and internationally.”

Deidre believes it can often be difficult for Christian women in secular society to find avenues to share their faith with one another.

“Sometimes we’re not able to openly speak about the transforming nature of Christ and Christ’s encounter with us. This conference gives people an opportunity to speak about that and how we are embodying that gospel of Christ without words, by being a compassionate presence in our work places, our neighbourhoods and our communities. We do live in a society where God is not always named. It is a secular society, but I think it is a society that is open to meaning making, spirituality, dealing with grief and loss and suffering. So the question is how do we work through that? I think Christian women have made meaning of their lives in relationship to the hope and transformation that Christ brings to them and that is something we can offer to others.”

The conference program features 21 workshops and more than 20 speakers over four days. When you are responsible for putting together such a comprehensive program, where do you start?

“The speakers are women who have made a significant contribution in their work places, in politics, education, social work, media. People who encounter them feel hopeful being around them; they can see a more hopeful future for our society, our church, for our personal lives because of these women.

“Some of them are members of the Uniting Church, some of them are members of other churches. What they have in common is that they are women who are contributing positively to making a difference to other people’s lives out of their Christian faith perspective.”

While Deidre is looking forward to hearing all of the presenters, she is particularly excited to have Khadija Gbla as the opening speaker.

“Khadija was Young South Australian of the Year in 2011. She is a remarkable young woman who was a refugee who has gone through incredible trauma and suffering and she has emerged from that in ways that have brought healing in her life. She has also shared her experiences and made it possible for other women to be empowered to have a voice and to find healing in their own lives.

“I am also looking forward to hearing our international speaker. Maleta Rumaroti is the general secretary of the church in Kiribati and she is addressing issues of climate in the Pacific. Maleta has seen the impact of climate change on women and men and children in that community and I am looking forward to hearing from her and what we might be able to do as Australians to contribute into that space.”



Bio: Dr Deidre Palmer is an educator, counsellor, theologian, social worker and Uniting Church Moderator for South Australia. She has spent her career studying, teaching and working in Christian education and youth and children's ministry in the Uniting Church. More recently she has embraced social work and has been a counsellor for Uniting Communities with their Childhood Sexual Abuse Counselling team.



## Across SA

Deidre points out that we share our stories of hope in a whole variety of ways. "You may speak them, you may sing them, you may paint them, you may do them via film. So on the Friday night of the conference a number of creative women will be sharing their stories of hope through music, art and film."

A highlight of the program will be a Q&A session on Saturday night, focussing on how women of faith are speaking into the public space, contributing to a more hopeful future for Australia. Participants will be drawn from the areas of social work, education, politics, advocacy for justice and working towards reconciliation between first and second peoples. Deidre is expecting some 'robust conversations' as they bounce ideas off one another.

Deidre has been the leader, or moderator, of the Uniting Church in South Australia for three years and will conclude her term in October. In 2018 she will then go on to be President of the Uniting Church in Australia.

"As moderator, I've gone around visiting local communities in rural and urban settings and I have been inspired by women of all ages who are embodying the gospel of compassion and hope in the world. The Uniting Women

conference is gathering together women's stories and sharing them with a broader group nationally and internationally. Some of these women's stories need to be heard. They are inspiring, I think they strengthen us as communities of faith and also give creative ideas to others about 'how can I witness to the gospel of Christ authentically in my urban context or my rural context or cross culturally?'

"As President I will have opportunities to network with these women across Australia. I've already had that opportunity in Vanuatu and Fiji and seen some of that work in the Philippines. I will carry these stories of hope with me as I speak."

Deidre emphasises that the conference will not simply involve sitting and listening, but that there will be opportunities to share with other women and to build relationships. "I really believe those who come will be inspired and I think it will be a life transforming experience for them."

*For more about Uniting Women*  
[unitingwomen.org.au](http://unitingwomen.org.au)  
[Facebook.com/UnitingWomen2016](https://www.facebook.com/UnitingWomen2016)  
 Or email [info@unitingwomen.org.au](mailto:info@unitingwomen.org.au)

## Money and Happiness

By Dr Nick Hawkes

Money can't buy happiness. According to an Australian survey lawyers and other well paid white collar workers are more likely to suffer depression. The survey of more than 7,500 professionals found almost ten percent reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms. This was significantly higher than the 6.3% registered for the general population.

If money can't buy happiness, why are we addicted to it ...even when we have more than enough to live on? Have we lost sight of what it is that really gives us meaning? Have we been deluded into stepping on a commercially driven treadmill that is spinning ever faster and faster until it will inevitably crash with economic meltdown against environmental degradation and non-sustainability?

How long will it be before we discover that the problem is not so much that we don't have enough things ...but that things, of themselves, are not enough? They are not enough because we need to know who we are and why we are. Above all, we need hope that all this stuff, called life, means something.

In essence, we need God to tell us our meaning and purpose. We need God's love to give us worth and God's purposes to give us hope. So, perhaps it's time you reconnected with God.

For more see: 'The Bible on the Key Issues of Life', by Dr Nick Hawkes, available from bookshops. Nick has degrees in science and theology. He is a pastor, writer and broadcaster.  
[nickhawkes.net](http://nickhawkes.net)



# ANCIENT STORIES, TIMELESS FAITH

*On Saturday 20 June 2015 hundreds of people gathered together at the Adelaide West Uniting Church to witness a landmark celebration. Rev Denise Champion, an Adnyamathanha (Flinders Ranges) woman, was the first Aboriginal woman to be ordained into Christian ministry in any denomination in South Australia. Denise talks to RISE about her journey, her culture and her passion for reconciliation.*

Interview by Belinda Taylor.  
Article by Wendy Rush.

“When I was about four Mum and Dad moved to Quorn in the Flinders Ranges from a sheep station where Dad had been working as a station hand. It was mainly so we children could go to school. Even though Mum and Dad didn’t go to church themselves until much later, they would get us ready and send us off to Sunday school every week. This was the foundation for my Christian faith. From then on, wherever I went I always had a connection with the church”

In the late 1970s Denise moved to Adelaide to attend Norwood High School for a year and lived in a hostel in Magill which was supervised by Christian house parents. She was invited to attend a gospel rally with evangelist Cliff Barrows in the town hall one

night. During the evening people were given an opportunity to go down to the front of the hall if they wanted to make a decision to follow Christ. “I was about 12 years old. I had twin sisters either side of me digging each other in the ribs and saying ‘you go first’. I found myself down the front being led through the ‘believer’s prayer”

Denise moved back to Port Augusta and finished year twelve at Port Augusta High School. One of her teachers, Graham Wright, was a Christian. Together with some music teachers from the junior high school who were also Christians, Graham formed a musical group at the school which flowed over to the church. Denise and her sisters became involved in what was then a very unique initiative.

“They had this very good perspective on involving young people in worship. Attending mainstream churches has been a challenge for Aboriginal people and you don’t see many in mainstream churches. But the Uniting Church in Port Augusta has worked very hard on their relationships with Aboriginal people.”

Living in nearby Quorn Denise recalls there was already an acceptance of Aboriginal people in the community.

“Quorn was where my faith journey began and I haven’t really gone too far away from it. In 2002 I went back there as a temporary minister for 12 months. My old Sunday school teachers were still there, the superintendent was still there, so I went back the returning student. It was a very exciting thing for me to go back there and I was kind of thanking them for giving their time and their gifts, making sure the children in their community learnt the basics about Jesus.”

As time went on Denise became more and more involved in church related activities. “When I was in my late teens and early twenties I studied at a Bible training institute. That really gave me a good opportunity to sit under some ministry lecturers. I found I really enjoyed that. The things that I was learning just whetted my appetite for wanting to do more.”

Denise married and had children and when her husband, a pastor, graduated from Bible college the family moved to inner city Melbourne for five years, working with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. From there they went to Ceduna in South Australia for five years, once again working with the Aboriginal fellowships. The family then ended up back at Port Augusta.





Flinders Ranges, South Australia. iStock.com/Totajla

“Because we had made a connection with the Congress (the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) - an association of Indigenous peoples within the Uniting Church) while we were in Ceduna we found ourselves relating to the Uniting Church in Port Augusta when we went back. I joined the ministry team there so that was part of my mentoring by people in that church, and I learnt to become a leader in worship and then other Aboriginal people started to come. One of the reasons was that there was Aboriginal leadership upfront and people felt comfortable to go to that church and they still do today.

“During the 1990s there was this growing awareness that we needed to have our own place for Aboriginal people. In Port Augusta Aboriginal people make up around 17% of the population so it’s a pretty significant proportion but it wasn’t being reflected in the congregation. We said our people needed their own space so we put a proposal to the Uniting Church’s governing body to have our own worshipping congregation and as a result the Congress (UAICC) in Port Augusta started in 2002.”

There have been some challenges that Denise has had to face along the way, including breaking some stereotypes.

“People thought the minister always had to be a man. Even today there’s that very strong thinking that the minister is a male, so in placing an Aboriginal woman minister we’re breaking those moulds, challenging the old ideas.”

Denise is clearly passionate about growing young Aboriginal leaders and about cross cultural education for non-Indigenous people. Out of that has grown the ‘walking on country’ pilgrimages. “I take people up into my country and along the way I’ve started to question how we do theology so I’ve written a book that looks at what our theology, our faith perspective is. The preamble of the Uniting Church’s constitution has given us the freedom to do that. It states that God was always in this country since time immemorial and sustained the First Peoples through their stories, culture, songs and ceremonies.

“I asked myself the question ‘how is God doing that?’ Being able to sit with that question and think about it and apply it to other things that I’ve learnt along the way, that’s something I knew God had done for my life. I started to see God from an Adnyamathanha perspective and I wanted to share that. So we take people up into country and do the story telling of the land. We let the land tell us the story and we uncover the hidden stories that are there.”

Denise is committed to helping First and Second Peoples find a path to reconciliation and she believes that God is using her in that area.

“Reconciliation comes through the building of relationships and what we do in our pilgrimages and in our association with the Uniting Church is a way of working on our relationships. We’ve created space to lament over the past, to be able to grieve, to say sorry and to heal. We’ve created a space and new opportunities arise for us to do that, through things like the pilgrimages.

*Hear more from Denise at the Uniting Women Conference [unitingwomen.org.au](http://unitingwomen.org.au). Denise will speak at 9.30am on Saturday 30 April with other Indigenous leaders, Brooke Prentis and Tanya Hosch. Denise will also facilitate a workshop as part of the conference with her daughter Candace Champion, ‘Embracing Our Destiny Together’ on Friday 29 April and Saturday 30 April at 2.15pm.*

*Denise’s book ‘Yarta Wandatha’ can be purchased by contacting Bev Freeman on 08 8236 4243 or [bfreeman@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:bfreeman@sa.uca.org.au).*



Bio: Rev Denise Champion is the Deacon of the Port Augusta Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and Chairperson of the Congress in South Australia. The Congress is formally recognised as having responsibility for oversight of the ministry of the Uniting Church with the Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia. She has been challenged in her work in facilitating reconciliation between First and Second Peoples, to create a safe community. A community where people can come together, sit and talk, and experience healing and forgiveness for the past, finding a new destiny together.

“It’s not only the Adnyamathanha pilgrimage, we now have the Kurna pilgrimage. And hopefully we will be able to connect other groups up to be able to take people out. There are already Aboriginal people doing cultural tours and white tour operators, but the pilgrimage is something different. It’s a learning opportunity - where people commit themselves to learn and see things differently.”

The popularity of the pilgrimages has grown to the point that it is becoming difficult to keep up with the demand. Denise believes that they are important as a path to reconciliation, and also learning where God is in her country. Her desire to serve the church in this way has grown, as has her desire to serve her own people.

“It’s important for my own mob, my own Aboriginal people, it gives them ownership. They’re able to go back on country and they’re able to tell their own story again and they know that people will listen. That’s transforming, that’s a new thing that God is doing in people. People are able to see the Biblical story afresh, through our very old oral tradition, storytelling. It has surprised me. Anything that God does, it’s surprising. When I look back on my faith journey I think, how could God take this little Adnyamathanha girl to here? Obviously there is something that God is wanting to do through pilgrimages. My passion is to pass on that knowledge to the younger people, helping them discover their faith and discover their culture as well.”

Denise wants all Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to participate in the reconciliation process. “Come with us on the journey. Come with us on a pilgrimage and let the land speak, and let the people speak. That’s the title of my book: *Yarta Wandatha: The land is speaking. The people are speaking*. When you come with us and you hear our creation stories, you’ll hear the most ancient voice of God speaking.”

# Inequality and the Power of Imagining a Different World

By Elenie Poulos. *Original article written for Wesley Mission Brisbane for Anti-Poverty Week October 2015.*



Bio: Rev Elenie Poulos is a Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia. She was appointed National Director UnitingJustice Australia in 2002 and is a member of the World Council of Churches' Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). She has a professional background in book publishing and an academic background in linguistics (BA Hons), language in education (MA), and theology (BTh). She is a doctoral student at Macquarie University studying public theology and human rights.

Inequality is a growing problem in Australia. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening and it's happening quickly. The latest report on inequality from the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), *A Nation Divided*, shows that the richest 10% of Australians hold 45% of all wealth (income plus property, shares, superannuation etc) while the bottom 40% hold only 5% of the wealth. To take another perspective, a person in the richest 20% has 70 times as much wealth as someone in the poorest 20%. Between 2004 and 2012 the wealth of the richest 20% of Australians increased by 28% while the wealth of the poorest increased by only 3%.

Excessive inequality is unjust and not good for the wellbeing of societies – not only is it bad for the country, affecting economic growth and stalling our shared prosperity, it's bad for communities and people, concentrating power in the already rich, undermining social cohesion, gender inequality and negatively affecting people's health and wellbeing.

While government policies are focussed on spending cuts not revenue raising, and those spending cuts are directed to public services and infrastructure, shrinking the safety net for those who struggle in our society and shifting to 'user-pays' systems in such essential services as healthcare and education, it is inevitable that the wealth gap will increase and become entrenched in families over generations.

Australia's wealth gap is not as big as it is in the US and the UK, for example, but it is above the OECD average and it is getting worse. But the real horror story is in the global figures. A study of the world's wealthiest people by Oxfam International in 2014 found that the world's 85 richest people of 2013 have the same share of the world's wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion people, that is half the world's population. Forbes magazine calculated that by 2014, it was the richest 67 people who had as much as the poorest half of the world.

Something is not working.

A statement adopted by the 12th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia in 2009, *An Economy of Life: Reimagining Human*

*Progress for a Flourishing World*, was the Church's response to recognising that in a globalised world, the many sufferings of humankind and the planet are all connected and that while we can try to treat some of the symptoms separately, the deep and abiding problems of violence and injustice will continue unless we make some radical changes to the systems and structures that determine how we live together and relate to the planet.

*An Economy of Life* states the Church's understanding that the global economic system will continue to do harm because of the values and assumptions inherent to it. Like any human construction, economic systems are never value free. What we have now are systems and structures that not only breed violence, poverty and injustice, they thrive on them. Materialism, individualism, greed for money and power, competition, commodification, the unlimited growth and a deeply embedded culture of consumerism: these are the values and the principles that guide the operation of our global economy.

It is true that through industrialisation, technological development and the globalisation of the free market economy, millions of people around the world now experience greater levels of health and prosperity than their ancestors could have imagined.

But somewhere along the way, the world was hijacked by neoliberal economic theory and now we have an extreme market fundamentalism driving not only our financial systems and structures, but our political and social systems as well; and it is globalised. Inequality and climate change are just two indicators that suggest a system that is out of control and wreaking injustice and violence on people and the planet.

The good news is that the economy is actually not some autonomous beast that is best left to its own devices. An economic system is developed by people and for people, and it can be helpful or unhelpful. If it's not helpful we can change it despite what vested interests would have us believe.

There are now more theologians, economists, philosophers, social theorists, social activists and concerned people all over the world challenging the assumption that the best we can do is just tinker with the system.

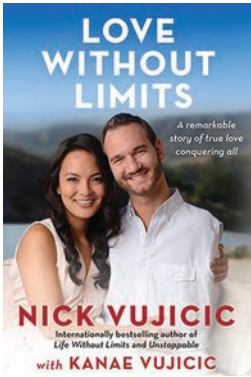
The Christian church, I believe, has a particular responsibility to challenge the mythology that there is no other way and to offer an alternative vision for what is possible.

The theme of a just economy runs strongly through the Bible which is full of stories warning about the dangers of greed and prioritising wealth and possessions ahead of relationships and the doing of justice. The Pope's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si* and the Uniting Church's *An Economy of Life* are both expressions of the Christian vision for an alternative economics; one based on the values and the principles core to faithful Christian living – compassion, hospitality, generosity, co-operation, relationship and community, respect for the natural world as God's good creation and life as God's abundant gift, and the need for societies to prioritise the needs of those who are poor, marginalised and oppressed.

I believe that the challenge which lies before us is to imagine a different story for the world: a decent market-based economy that is built on measuring human progress in terms of wellbeing rather than the capacity to consume; that encourages, even rewards, co-operation, social responsibility and generosity; that upholds the values of simplicity and hospitality, addresses the needs of the most vulnerable as a priority, and supports the cause of peacemaking not the business of war.

Once we can imagine a different story we can better hold on to the power of love, justice and peace to transform our world, and we can begin to open up opportunities and spaces for bold, peaceful, creative, hope-filled, inspiring and transformative resistance. It is time for us to find the courage and the will to interrupt the systems those in power keep telling us cannot be interrupted or changed.





## Love Without Limits

by Nick Vujicic with Kanae Vujicic

Nick Vujicic is an Australian now living in the US. In this book, he and his wife Kanae tell the story of how they met, fell in love, married and began a family together. What makes this story remarkable is that Nick was born without arms or legs. Growing up he despaired of ever finding a woman that would love him and he felt that he would never have the capacity to be a husband and support a family.

But thankfully, God had a different plan for his life.

Like any other young man or woman, Nick had a desire to love and be loved by that special someone, but for one reason or another his relationships didn't work out. Even when he met Kanae there was misunderstanding and miscommunication which Nick, in hindsight, likens to a romantic comedy. Over time Nick and Kanae found they had a very strong connection and they both wanted to be together. Occasionally Kanae steps into the story and gives her perspective on the relationship and their journey together.

This is a remarkable and inspiring love story which will provide great encouragement to anyone who desires love but thinks they are unlovable. It also contains some great advice, not only for those looking for love, but those who are looking at building a marriage, a home and a family.

Nick and Kanae admit they are still new to marriage and that they are far from experts in the field. However, their unique circumstances (Nick's lack of limbs, and his work as an international evangelist in particular) have meant that they have learned much that readers can relate to and take inspiration from. Each chapter of the book focuses on certain aspects of the search for love which many of us will find familiar. There are questions to contemplate when meeting someone who you think might be 'the one', some things you should talk about before jumping into proposing, matters of faith, sex and abstinence, a reminder that marriage means constant work and negotiation, a 'survival guide' for the first year of life with a child, even ideas on how you can make your proposal and wedding personal and unique.

The book is peppered with humour and amusing anecdotes as Nick, in his usual style, refuses to take himself too seriously. Nick and Kanae's relationship is living proof that it is possible to experience 'love without limits' and their story is a testament to a loving God who desires much more for us than we could ever imagine for ourselves. 'Love Without Limits' is a beautiful story of faith, hope and love.

'Love Without Limits' is published by Allen & Unwin. It is available in paperback from Koorong (online and instore).

Reviewer: Wendy Rush



## Broken and Beautiful

by Kylie Brice

Kylie Brice is an Adelaide musician and songwriter and this is her debut EP. Having won a local song writing competition which awarded her some recording time, she released her debut single 'Journey to Myself' in 2015.

The single features on this EP 'Broken and Beautiful', officially launched on 26 February this year. Her sound has been described as 'Missy Higgins meets Clare Bowditch'. Her lyrics reflect her struggle with anxiety and depression, but are actually uplifting and in a way triumphant. The recording has a clean acoustic, almost live, sound to it and the guitars are backed up by strings which at times seem to follow the emotive rise and fall of the lyrics.

'Fly with Me' is a song of celebration and healing and reminds us that 'broken can be beautiful'. I think this song is one that particularly highlights Kylie's beautiful vocal capability.

'Who Am I' has a Latin feel and is slightly more up tempo. Even though it speaks about the struggle to accept love and freedom when we feel unworthy, it is a little bit playful: 'who am I to change your mind'.

'Recharge' warns us not to overdo it when giving ourselves to others. We need to look after ourselves, and ensure there's a little bit left for 'me'.

Most of us will relate to 'Song for the Weary', which gently speaks to our insecurity and weakness, then earnestly assures us that we don't have to walk through life alone.

'Journey to Myself' is another of Kylie's songs that really highlights her beautiful vocals. This song says something about the futility of building our life and identity around things that are temporary and, in some respects, sets up the theme for the EP which is primarily about self discovery and the search for identity.

Kylie has a wonderful ability to express in words and music what many of us have experienced or indeed are going through. In her songs we can at times recognise ourselves and her message of hope – that everyone is valued, that there is someone who loves you and wants to walk with you. Clever lyrics, lovely musical arrangements, the combination of strings and guitar and the clarity of Kylie's vocals are enough to make this EP potentially a commercial success. You don't need to be a 'believer' to enjoy her music and her message, or to sense something spiritual in her songs. But to those who are Kylie's Christian faith, which has helped her negotiate some tough times, certainly shines through.

See Kylie's article in this edition of RISE magazine.

*CD credits: Kylie Brice - vocals and guitar, Robin Lewis – guitar, David Kitteringham – bass, Hannah Yates – cello, Jessica Goodluck - backing vocals, Craig Atkins – percussion. Tracks 1-4 recorded by Matthew Vecchio at Karisma Recording Studio, Track 5 recorded by Matt Williams at Fat Trax Studio. Cover photography by Laura Jane, face and body art by Margie Goodluck, graphic design by Matt Goodluck.*

'Broken and Beautiful' is available from [kyliebricemusic.com](http://kyliebricemusic.com)

Reviewer: Wendy Rush

Fancy yourself as a reviewer? We welcome expressions of interest from people who would like to write or submit reviews for Rise Magazine. Please email Wendy at [info@risemagazine.com.au](mailto:info@risemagazine.com.au) for more information.

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## WAR ROOM

PRAYER IS A POWERFUL WEAPON



From the award-winning creators of *Fireproof* and *Courageous* comes *WAR ROOM*, a compelling drama with humour and heart.

“*WAR ROOM* is a powerful, compelling reminder not only of the nature of our battle, but the power of prayer to defeat our enemy. Life-giving transformation is found as we cry out to God in believing prayer. And this movie is a call to followers of Christ to get back to the place of real influence: on our knees!”

Dr. Crawford W. Loritts, Jr. Author, Speaker, Radio Host Senior Pastor,  
Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, Georgia

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