

# THE ISSUE IS...

by Vida de Voss

**AT THE END OF ANOTHER YEAR IT IS ONLY REASONABLE TO REFLECT ON THE YEAR THAT WAS: TO BE CONSCIOUSLY GRATEFUL FOR THE GOOD AND TO GROW AND LEARN WHAT ONE CAN FROM THE NEGATIVE.** In this way the negative does not have the final say as we turn it into a learning of whatever kind, which is ultimately empowering.

The claim of turning the bad into something good may meet the objection that it is naive and fails to recognise the deep losses and pain people may have suffered. The disclaimer should therefore be understood unequivocally: arguing that the negative can be turned into something good, is not the same as claiming it would inevitably have turned into something positive. Not at all. It is also not a matter of claiming that the bad was necessary for the good to become possible. Because in many cases the negative simply leads to more negative.

The argument for the learning of whatever kind depends on choice, which in a cliché expression, comes down to a matter of “becoming bitter or better.” With the former outcome the person who suffered the loss or the pain is unable to move beyond it, remaining stuck in the brokenness, the anger, the need for revenge. In the latter case the person decides to move beyond the trauma.

Many of the articles published in the *Sister Namibia* magazine tell the story of individuals who have survived some kind of trauma. Whatever the source of their resilience, these women have transformed that negativity into something positive.

In “King’s Daughters: Beyond surviving” (Vol 29.2), Esme Kisting fills the vacuum left by her husband’s death with working with sex workers to help them stay off the streets. In “Like a lion watching gazelles” (Vol 29.3), Lucy Witts shares her story of grooming by a paedophile to act as educating others around various aspects of such a relationship. “Claire’s footsteps inspire” (Vol 29.3), tells the story of Claire McFarlane who is in the second year of a three year endeavour to run 16km of beach in all coastal countries in the world –

184 countries in total. This adventure was, however, birthed in response to the trauma of rape and a 16-year battle with the French legal system.

Can we say Esme’s husband passed away *so that* she could help sex workers? Or that Lucy had to be sexually abused for a decade *so that* she could become an educator on this topic? Similarly, we would never say Claire was brutally attacked and violated *so that* she would go extreme with beach running. And yet that is how we talk. We look at bad experiences and say, “but there was a reason for it”.

I beg to disagree. It happened. The terrible thing happened as a result of somebody’s choice or some element in nature that disrupted matters in the preferred course of our lives. In itself it did not happen for a reason or intended future purpose.

And then, in response to this negative thing that happened – people responded, choosing to allow the trauma to destroy them further or deciding to reach for life. Esme decided to serve others struggling with their own trauma; Lucy decided to support other victims of Dragan’s paedophile behaviour and in the end did a documentary on her own experience; and Claire chose to use adventure travel and beach running to connect people and institutions to have conversations on a topic which often leaves the victim coping in isolation or traumatised over and over again through various failed systems such as the medical, legal or other systems.

Thus reflecting on the past and appreciating the strength, women like Esme, Lucy and Claire share with the world; we recognise it was not a given that their course of action would automatically result from what had happened to them. For, many other people have had similar experiences and they did not respond as these women did.

When we thus celebrate the good of the year that was, we should also celebrate the wisdom and strength of people such as Esme, Lucy and Claire for the choices they have made to choose life and share life beyond the trauma of death and destruction that befell them. ♀