Jussey: … Silent Too Long grew out of a therapeutic group that we held at a Community Health Centre and it was … we used narrative ways of working with that group and out of that therapeutic group, that everybody in the group said, we don’t want this to end, that we want to carry it on in some way, and that was in the mid 1990s and at that point, there was not much information around …

Chris: Very little.

J: About the history of sexual abuse, and violence as well, and so that the women in the group really wanted to be a voice for survivors of child sexual abuse, and so I think using those narrative understandings, that as a group, you know, we met fairly regularly, that women were able to really take those ideas and that’s a sense that I think those key aspects, like they were experts on their own life and that it was possible to, through using those alternative understandings, to be able to really think their own understandings of who they are in the world. And we were talking earlier about the migration of identity, and about how, in the group, that everybody had loved that as an idea and then kind of took it on as well.

C: They ran with it, for sure.

…

C: Really really taking it into our life … I myself personally found it incredibly helpful on really difficult days to know that it’s not going to last forever, and that the ups and downs would … you know, if you’re down, you’re not going to stay down, you’re going to come up again, and if you’re on a high, a manic high or something, you’re not going to stay there either and you’re going to come and slowly … it’ll come out into a more even keel and then reach the shoreline so, that was the … one of the tools that really helped me through some really bad times. So yeah.

J: And I think we had lots of discussions around the migration of identity into terms of acknowledging the trauma and the pain and the hurt, and the actual impact that it had on people’s lives, and then alongside of that, doing a lot of discussions about how was it that even as tiny children, that the women had been able to live through those experiences and the very strategies that they had used, and how that had then…I think, made it possible for women to revere themselves, not just as victims, but as people who were doing their darndest –

C: Acts of resistance.


C: Things you used to get in trouble for were quite good! (laughter)
J: Yes indeed, yeah yeah. And I remember having that discussion about tomboys especially, and I think everybody in the group had been a “tomboy” because that had been the way that they felt …

C: Definitely.

J: … that they could try and keep themselves safe, and that the discussion had been that some of the women had felt ashamed of it, that they hadn’t been, you know, the typical girly image. And yet, after this discussion about what women were actually doing, or what those children were actually doing, was actually saying ‘no’ as loud as they possibly could …

C: As much as you could.

J: As much as you could, and that then women really took from that, and kind of stepped into this sense of … yeah!

C: Yeah!

J: And that they really were … they had tried their darndest to either keep themselves safe, or to try and get help, and in many instances, that wasn’t always possible, but that they had endeavoured …

C: Particularly from my age group, we were seen and not heard, basically, and there was no … nowhere you could go, nowhere, so those acts of resistance, when I heard about them, that was really good, yeah.

J: I remember you saying that you would rollerblade down steep hills, is that right?

C: Oh yeah.

J: As a kick.

C: And, into traffic! I was doing it.

J: And also when we talked about the migration of identity, what I really liked about it was that, again, that the women in the group took that idea and then modified it, and so there was that sense that, um, we may go through life’s journey and there’d be these ups and downs and what have you, but that there wasn’t a clear ending and so there was discussion about how it could almost be like you were in the sea, and your feet might be on the sand, and the water’s up to here, and you can see in the distance that there’s the shoreline up there, and women are gradually making their way …

C: I remember we had like a bit of a … brainstorming, and we used to imagine things in the water that we’ve taken with us that were useful with us for the journey …

J: That’s right.

C: Like wreckage, you know, now you climb up on this thing, oh yeah that will work, and oh no, I don’t need that, climb on that one. Yeah so that was good, that you can ditch things that are no good, and hang onto things that are good on your journey.

J: And also, as you were saying, because it’s a shoreline, it’s not clearly defined so that people might feel there are areas of their life that perhaps they’d landed and where they’re feeling that they have some sense of competency, or they’re feeling safe or what have you, but maybe there were still other areas of their life where maybe they’re still back in the water over here.
C: Or maybe way over there sometimes! But you’re always moving forwards, yeah.

J: Yes, and I think that was the sense of hope that really came out of the group too. There was an acknowledgement of the pain and the fear and the shame and all of those things, and how, that they would still come up and bite people from time to time, but that sense that there was hope and that acknowledgement of the many, many things that women had actually done to really … to get themselves to today.

C: That’s right.

J: And as we know, there were some women in the group who’d had some horrific histories and so to be able to acknowledge the strategies that they had put into place to have survived, and to be healthy now, yeah, that was great. And so, you know, I think narrative made that all very possible.

C: And very respectful, very respectful, that was one of the things that impacted me the most, coming from a very disempowering, un-respectful medical system.

J: Yes.