**“Free as a Bird”**

**Host: Pauline Vetuna**

**Guests: Jane Rosengrave**

**Transcript by Leilanu Fuimaono**

ANNOUNCER: In today's show, we will be talking about domestic violence. If this is confronting for you, then please tune out. You can also contact Lifeline on 131114, or Wellways helpline on 1300 111 500.

JANE: I'd like to begin by paying my respects to the Wurunderji people, to the traditional custodians of this land where we are meeting upon today, for its elders, past and present. And even for the self advocacy people as well who have passed away too and who are still here today on the Aboriginal land. Thank you. My name's Jane Rosengrave, and you're listening to a Yorta Yorta strong, powerful woman on Disability Day. The radio show's going to be called “Free As A Bird, of Jane's Life”.

PAULINE: We should just start yarning then, hey?

JANE: Yes!

PAULINE: So. I've seen you a couple of times around the place.

JANE: Yep.

PAULINE:I think the first time we met was at Ross house I believe.

JANE: Yes. Yeah.

PAULINE: And you came in, I was at RISE Refugee for something.

JANE: Yeah.

PAULINE: And you came in with art.

JANE: Yes.

PAULINE: So why don't we start there.

JANE: Okay. Well, I had a feeling that I had art in me, but I didn't know fully in July after I left my partner and I started really getting involved in the art. It was dot painting I was doing. And since I've been through domestic violence and if other women out there who are going through it and if they want to do something about it on leaving their partners, I've done this painting here that's got free as a bird. And it was all to do to with domestic violence, for women to come forward and tell their stories. And then I've done another one for Open Place, which is for people who've been brought up in homes. And that's part of it for the stolen generation. Part of it's for the forgotten Australians, for the ones who was put into institutions. And I've done other paintings as well; dot paintings and I've done one for...

PAULINE: For RISE.

JANE: For RISE. And that one stands for the people who's on an Island, but they can be shifted off the island and taken to an organisation where they'll be looked after and all that and not to be forgotten. Yeah.

PAULINE: You also crochet?

JANE: Oh yes. I've been doing crocheting from when I was five years old and it was one of the teachers that taught me at the institution. You might say not the school, but the home was a jail, but the school was okay, but it was connected to the jail.

My teacher when I was six years old, she got permission for me to go out with her because she had a family in Bacchus Marsh. And it was her mom that taught me how to crochet. That was what I was having fits and that. And then when I used to have a fit, I used to get warning signs, they were hot in the head. And I used to walk out to the shed, at the front of the shed and I used to talk to myself and shuffle my shoulders and that's when I knew I was going to have a fit that night.

PAULINE: And I know you had surgery to help with those and fix those.

JANE: Yes. I had the brain surgery in 2004 but in the late 1990s another friend of mine who was having fits, they asked her and she said, "yes, definitely because I want to have the kids." So when they done the brain surgery on her, it all worked out. And then down the track, they asked me and I just said, "Yes!" Because I was always upset when I used to go to the doctors at The Royal Women's Hospital and they knew that I was not with it properly.

And my partner used to come with me. But it was after the brain surgery that things changed because it took, oh about five hours for the brain surgery, because they had removed the scar that was on a temporal lobe.

And then after that my partner didn't like it because I didn't need him anymore. I was going out to Melbourne a lot more. He was doing the housework, the shopping, the cleaning, while I was there going to Melbourne! And I love it. [laughter]

And that's when I started like not being free as a bird, but I started feeling a bit more stronger. But it was after I left him. That's when I started feeling free as a bird, definitely.

PAULINE: Yeah. So that's kind of why I brought up the surgery, because it seems to me like that's when you started coming out.

JANE: Yep.

PAULINE: You got clear in the mind. You gained some independence and then you started realizing, "Hmm, I'm not happy with this relationship."

JANE: No.

PAULINE: "I deserve better."

JANE: That's right. Well I wasn't really happy with it from I reckon from '98, '99. Before that, I was happy in a relationship. But that's when the domestic violence started and that's when I started not liking him. But I was still too scared to tell people because of the institutional days. They wouldn't believe you. But it was after that brain surgery that things started to change and he didn't like it. And I gave him three warnings. And it was that third one that I left him for good. And he wrote me a long, long letter, five pages back to front and I've still got those today.

PAULINE: You still got the letter?

JANE: Yes. And I've even still got, when he said to me, "Oh, I want you to say sorry in this particular way." Because he knew my brain was not working properly when I was having the fits. And he was dominating me and I had to work it out, how to say sorry. And it took days. He wouldn't sleep with me.

He'll go out and sleep in the back room until I worked out how to say sorry. Mmm. I've been pushed around my first half my life from the institution and from my relationship. No way it's going to happen again because I'm staying as free as a bird until the day I die until I go into ashes.

PAULINE: Okay. So much there. So much to talk about just from that statement.

JANE: Yeah.

PAULINE: So you left and I want to talk about that because we both know it's really hard for people to leave abusers.

JANE: It is, definitely.

PAULINE: And people need support to do that.

JANE: Oh God, yeah.

PAULINE: How did you actually leave? Who supported you?

JANE: Well, what I did is I gave him three chances. It was the third chance, after he headlocked me, slapped me across the face and kept me hostage in the community house and I had some bruises on me after he threw things at me, that I wrote these things down, what he did to me. And I kept them in a sacred place.

The next day I said to him, "I'll see you tonight darling. Okay? And he thought I was only going up to Centerlink and then coming back. No way. I just went straight to Melbourne. And I had my paperwork with me and I wrote everything down, what was going on while it was all fresh in the mind.

And that's when he realized, because I crashed into a friend of mine, told my friend what happened. She read the pages back to front, 13 pages. She said, "Do you want to go to the police? And I go, "I do, but I'll go to Open Place first." So I went there.

Open place, helped me. Went back to the police, told the police what happened. They said, "Right, we'll do something about it." And I put a restriction order on him and I took him to court. I wasn't that cruel for him to go to jail, but I didn't want to go back into the house. I didn't want him to live in that house. And he can pay the high rent. *[laughter]*

PAULINE: Yes, he can pay the rent.

JANE: While I am in Melbourne and I'm living somewhere else, you know? So I had helped with that with Open Place.

PAULINE: Can you explain what Open Place is?

JANE: Yeah. Open Place is an organization for the children from the last century, when they were taken off their families and put into institutions and they were sexually abused, physically abused, traumatised and all that. And Open Place has got counseling, friends to catch up, talk about what happened when they need help and all that. All that type of stuff. Yeah, it's from those olden days.

PAULINE: One thing that people are trying to flee an abusive partner, often have to deal with is housing. So where did you stay?

JANE: There's an organization called Sacred Heart Mission, which is in St. Kilda and it's for women who want to leave their partners for good. You cannot know where the place is. But when you're with someone, who you can trust and they come and support you, that person is not allowed to drop you off in front. They have to drop you off about five houses down, then you've got to walk back.

PAULINE: Yeah. To protect people.

JANE: That's right. Yeah. You can even not let your partners know too as well. They're real secure and there's cameras there too everywhere. So that's one good thing about that place. You're really secure there, until they can find you another house.

But you're under them for certain amount. But then you go to another place but still under Sacred Heart Mission. But you're learning to look after yourself. Yeah, supported combination. Then they come and check up on you and help you with the shopping and learning to look after yourself.

PAULINE: So you learned how to do all those things for yourself that you weren't allowed to, because people weren't treating you well.

JANE: That's right. And doing shopping, washing and we had jobs, little jobs, which we do. Like go out when we want to.

PAULINE: Independence.

JANE: That's it.

PAULINE: Yes. That's what we want around here.

JANE: That's right. Being strong, powerful, not depending on anyone else. I’m free as a bird because I worked it out all year. I left him at the age of 15. I've still got 50 years of living. I'm having to live to a 100, so I just said, "Well I'm glad I've done the right thing. And that's the way it's going to stay for the rest of my life."

And if other women want to do the same thing as me, they should think about their life first, for their future. And if they do want to leave their partners, they have to trust someone who they can talk to. They have to go to the organisations for the women, domestic violence organizations, Women With Disabilities, Victoria, the Aboriginal one.

PAULINE: Djirra.

JANE: Djirra. There it is for the ones who are Indigenous, to leave their partners as well. If they want to have helped so they can leave their partners and not tell their partners where they are going and take them to court and all this. And there's The Department of Justice. Legal Aid, that's the other one.

Yes. If they want to put a restriction order on their partners and all that as well. So there's a few organisations out there if they do want to leave their partners. Because while they're with their partners they are not feeling free to me. They have to keep things inside them. And the more you keep things inside them, it bottles up and it's not good for your health.

PAULINE: In all of your advocacy, because you've done so much, when you're telling a story, you've often talked about how important it is to do that.

JANE: Yes.

PAULINE: And the reasons why you do that is because you know what it feels like to keep things bottled inside you for so long.

JANE: That's right. Yes.

PAULINE: Can you talk a little bit about that and why it's so important to speak up?

JANE: Yeah. When I was with the ex, I was keeping things bottled up and there was really only one person from when I was having the fits, that knew what was going on. And that was my caseworker.

But I only had one time with her, all the other times he would make sure he's there. That's when I couldn't say anything and it was bottling up, bottling up. I was having fits, fits, fits, fits, fits. And my health was just going downhill. And that's when I felt like if I was kept like in an institution and threatened not to tell anybody what was going on behind closed doors.

PAULINE: Can you talk a little about the self advocacy group that you are a part of?

JANE: It was after I had the brain surgery in 2004, that I joined Reinforce. I was already with AMIDA in the '90s but I was only on their committee. And ever since then that's when I've got a lot stronger, powerful, more wiser, and my partner has known a big difference in me and he didn't like that. He didn't because he knew that I was taken away his domineering.

He was just getting jealous and jealous of it. Because, he couldn't tell me what to do. And that's when I was with Reinforce and learning a lot more about myself. Standing up for yourself, having a voice to be heard, not to be denied. To be listened to and to have that support beside you. And that's when I went on the Reinforce committee meeting. And then went on to their ADMs and that's when I started learning a lot.

Then it was after I left him, I learnt a lot more. It was that time after I left, after I had the brain surgery and I left him. Eight years after I had the surgery, that I started changing, my health started to get improved. I didn't need to depend on anyone else. And I felt like if I was... more freedom. I didn't need anyone else. And I just felt like, that's when I started doing a lot of painting and all that then. Because he wouldn't like it if I was painting when I was with him. So I started doing painting and it was always in me. And that's when I started feeling comfortable, wanted, listen to, helping people, helping, being not ignored, all that.

*[musical interlude]*

JANE: People seeing other people's stories on when they were brought up in institutions. And they were telling those stories so it can be out there for the ones who have not been brought up in homes, on what it was like in those days. How were we treated? What was the food like? What did we get? We got Charlie the strap, and we got velvet soap rubbed in our mouth for swearing at the staff. We used to get put to bed at 5:30. It was like a jail in those days. And it was telling those people, the ones who never grew up in a home, what we went through.

There was no favoritisms. What those days were like. We only got 10 cents or 20 cents. And had the sunny boys in those days because they took a long time to suck. they did, and that's why we used to get them and that.

I used to always ask for handfuls of lollies. And we used to go for long walks as well. If we wet ourselves, we get our nose rubbed in it, which is punishment for doing it and that. Yes, we used to jump over the beds, hide under the beds, play hide and seek. Go outside at night, and we used to get into trouble for that.

And another thing, we used to have trampolines in the institution too I remember. And we used to do somersaults in the trampolines.

PAULINE: Oh my gosh.

JANE: I've got photos of me on the trampoline.

PAULINE: Oh wow.

JANE: Yeah.

PAULINE: I'm really glad that you have those good memories.

JANE: Well yeah, there were good memories, there was. And there was the bad memories as well. Yeah. And we used to have pine trees. All institutions used to always have big pine trees.

And the reason why was to cover up what was going on behind closed doors. So they were all near the Western, they were all near the highways, these intuitions were. For the truckies to go to wherever they’re going, or cars. But they couldn't see what was going on behind these closed big pine trees.

That's how they built these homes in those days. To put them away from the community. So what was going on behind there, no one knew until the mouths started lagging. And the words, talk started telling. What was going on behind closed doors, which was good in one way. Do you know what I mean by that? By the talk?

By us people starting to tell the story to make sure it was being believed. Some of the staff were honest and they came forward and told their stories, told what was going on behind closed doors. Because us, we were just treated like a bunch of sheep from one paddock to another.

And the paddocks are wards from one ward to another. That's how we were treated. We were not being looked after properly. They were just like jails, they were yeah.

PAULINE: So do you feel comfortable talking about the current inquiry?

JANE: Oh yeah. Do you mean the one that's on now?

PAULINE: Yeah.

JANE: Yeah. Yeah.

PAULINE: All right. So can you tell us about how you've been involved in the current inquiry into institutional abuse?

JANE: Yep. The current inquiry to do with the elderly and the nursing homes, because people had been caught treating the older clients, the bad way. Which they shouldn't have been treated.

Some of the family has secretly behind a pot plant, put a camera there, so they can film what was going on. Because they can tell by their family member, that they aren't them usual selves. And that's when a couple of days that they come back and they get the camera and they watch it. And then that's when they got caught out, these people. Which I'm glad they did.

Because to me we should be treated equally, even if we are elderly people, elders, and the Aboriginal people, elders, we should be treated equally like anyone else, even if they were in these nursing homes and that.

There shouldn't be no favoritisms. They should be just treated all equal and that. Me telling my story about what happened to me in the institution, people should take note of that if they are working in an elderly home and they shouldn't be treating those people the way I was treated in these homes.

*[musical interlude]*

JANE: Now I am as free as a bird. And you only live once on this planet. So if you want to think of leaving your partner take note what I say, because when you're dead, you go into sawdust. My name is Jane Rosengrave, and you're listening to a Yorta Yorta strong, powerful woman on Disability Day on 3CR.