

Warning message: ([00:00](#))

This podcast series, will share personal moments of connection and deeply felt experiences. If anything you hear has a triggering effect, please reach out to someone who can help keep you safe. Or, remember you can call lifeline at any time on 13, 11, 14

Amanda: ([00:19](#))

On the ground, also, you can see there's some rocks. I mean, I've always been a rock big rock painter. I love, I love the, the front third of a painting. I've always focused on the detail because you know, the other two thirds are a distance. So I usually do a lot of rocks at the, at the front because we live in outback, New South Wales, there's a lot of rocks around, but I turned my rocks into, the antidepressants that I was prescribed, and chose not to take. So that's what I strew on the ground instead of the rocks.

Beverley: ([00:51](#))

Welcome to Lifeline's holding on to hope. A Podcast in which people share their stories of battling depression and dark thoughts. This is the story of Amanda. She had a career, as a hugely successful artist, but after having children decided to stop. In hindsight, she admits it was too much of a stop. She found hope in a very special exercise group and the sharing of sadness and success with a group of friends, including Fran and Barb,

Amanda: ([01:20](#))

I thought, I want to have art in my life. So in those five years that I worked at the south mine, I painted, painted in my, my little shed that my dad built me in the backyard. I'd met my husband, we'd met each other, he was just starting his apprenticeship and I was in year 11 and we met and we've been together ever since, but he is a big car restorer. So him and my dad were in my dad's shed, my dad built me a little garden shed in the backyard and that's where I taught myself to paint. So I'd go off to a local library or I'd hang out for that very odd Sunday that the ABC would put on a show about painting, which, you know, usually they're art show was either opera or some orchestral thing, but sometimes they would put actual doco on about painting.

Amanda: ([02:10](#))

And that was just great, but no Internet back then, you know, I couldn't Google anything. So the Broken Hill city library was where I did a lot of my research, looked at all the art I could find in those, world books, and then I'd take myself off to the bookshops and that type of thing, so yeah, that I knew that's what I wanted to do. So I enrolled in the local ceramic classes, which were very huge in the 80s and I said to the lady there that was a 22 year old, and I said, if you ever want to sell your business, please give me a first option. So she did. And it just so happened that it was , we were getting married in October and that

was when I bought this business. So we went into our marriage with, I'd cashed in my super, which wasn't very much after five years of working.

Amanda: ([02:53](#))

So I, we entered our marriage and me as a 23 year old went into my first business. So it was so popular. We were running so many classes a week. We had, you know, a hundred or so students. I ended up with seven employees. We poured and fired our kilns, three kilns we fired every day of the week, seven days a week. And it was a really good little business. We bought the building that we were renting with my little ceramic business in there. So we bought our building, we paid off any loans that we had and then, I like to be organized. So now it was time to have a family. So we had an overseas trip. We came back Yep. And, fell pregnant within six months, which was pretty, pretty good. And then, uh, I had my son Alex, and we still kept the ceramic business, but I, took a step back and my sister rented the, well leased, sort of the business from me.

Amanda: ([03:51](#))

I sort of oversaw it, but she had the day to day running stuff happening. And then when I fell pregnant on my daughter who was born two years, just over two years after Alex Lauren, that's when we decided to sell the business. So we had no trouble selling the business. Sold, the building and everything that went with it. So I sort of cut myself off from being this career minded person, working every day, having employees, you know, having interaction with adults all the time, planning my own trajectory to the unknowns of being a mother, which, you know, throws you all sorts of curveballs and also being a mother. I mean, I only realized this stuff in hindsight. I didn't know it at the time, but obviously you can't be as creative when you're, you've got literally especially, , you know, a real active two year old boy that wants to be climbing and doing and being amused.

Amanda: ([04:48](#))

And he was just a total boy. And then my daughter, who was just the best baby ever had just slept and ate and slept, but it's just, I couldn't get my paints out. I couldn't do anything Alex and want to be in my lap. My daughter had needs and that's, that's fine. That's how it should be. But that wasn't good for me, you know. So I had, I started to get myself into a bit of a hole. I'd put on a lot of weight, I just didn't feel that I was of any use pretty much to, to anything. I've got myself in a real, different mind space. Everything should have been perfect. I mean, I had a, I mean I've suffered from morning sickness for the first 12 weeks of both pregnancies, but after that they were good pregnancies. I had, two natural births.

Amanda: ([05:36](#))

you know, I think Alex was five hours. Lauren might've been about three and a half hours, so you know, nothing to report there. You know I had a little bit of trouble breastfeeding of Alex, but we sorted that out and that, that all and with Lauren it was just, you know, plain sailing. It was all good. But I did have this, I'd put on 20 kilos and I wasn't happy with the, I looked the expectation of getting back to the way I was before I had children. Yeah. I didn't make that expectation with myself. And plus it's a 24 hour job to be a parent, you know, and I wanted to do the cloth nappies and I wanted to do the breastfeeding and I wanted, I wanted to do everything as naturally and as right as I could, my husband was a great help, you know, he'd, I'd breastfeed, he'd burp.

Amanda: ([06:20](#))

So, you know, I'd get back to sleep, he'd be burping the baby until he got a burp out of it. We shared the, the nappy washing and all the rest of the stuff that went with it, but I still didn't feel like I was handling it the way that was probably expected from, you know, nobody. But I felt like it was expected in the wider community that I should be handling all these things. I say my Post Natal Depression really kicked in after Lauren and I think obviously that was because Alex was so active and Lauren was a great baby, but she still had her needs, you know, we had to get everything sorted with her. And I think it was a gradual thing, a gradual thing of, it just sort of crept up on me and I couldn't see why I had any, I didn't have any reason to be depressed.

Amanda: ([07:07](#))

A husband that loves me, beautiful children. I've got my whole family here in broken hill. I've got a fantastic sister, brother-in-law, two nephews. My husband's got an extended family. We've, we're just so blessed. Everything was in broken hill, but here I am with no reason whatsoever on, on the outside. But you know, that's how different thing that was happening within my head. I went to the doctors, I just sat there and I was so emotional. I was, I cried all the time. I, went to the doctors and I told him my story and he said, I think you need these antidepressants. And I feel that I'm a, an addictive personality. If I find something that I like, I'll, I will totally focus on that. I didn't want to try antidepressants. I thought there's gotta be another way that I can make myself better rather than an artificial means.

Amanda: ([07:57](#))

And I know, I totally know that that doesn't work for everybody, but I just now in myself that it wasn't going to be the answer for me. If I'd have scratched the surface, I would have, you know, maybe rang lifeline and had to talk to somebody, but I didn't have the knowledge back then. And you know, it was all just a little bit to over overcoming and overpowering for me to, to be looking at anybody else, or any other avenues. So I can remember I went into my backyard sort as far, far away as I could get from the house. And I just

remember turning around and looking back at this really nice little scene of my husband in side with my two children. And it seemed all very, Hollywood but, I thought if I weren't around, I don't think it would matter to anybody. That I think was my lowest point. I'm not saying that, um, you know, I had suicidal thoughts, which, but I think it was sort of getting to that stage.

Lifeline: ([08:56](#))

There is always hope. Lifeline is here to help. Reach out to us on 13, 11, 14 or via web chat each night at lifeline.org.au

Amanda: ([09:11](#))

so a little bit after that, I took the kids out to my dad and I said, I just don't think I can get these kids out of their pajamas. And my dad said to me, you know, you're the only person that came at yourself better. And I really took that on board. I do have this one little letter from my son Alex, scrawled out and it says, please stop crying, mum. It'll be okay. So I've kept that letter. So me thinking that I'm handling everything, you know, the kids don't know that I'm crying most days. They knew, kids know. And I was just at my local hairdressers one day and they were more like friends than, than hairdressers, they were great, it was like going to a bit of a family gathering. When you went to the hairdresser's it was always the new magazines there. And Diane always had the latest gossip.

Amanda: ([10:00](#))

And so I'd been going there since I was a teenager and Diane was telling me that her husband has started this little gym group where, um, you know, they all just got together and walked and maybe they would, , lift a few little two kilo weights or something. And I thought, well, that's something I can do, you know, and it was six o'clock in the morning and I thought, oh, I don't know how I'm gonna get out of bed and be able to put my makeup on and do my hair and do all that sort of stuff so I can go to the gym at six o'clock. And then I had the realization that, oh, maybe I didn't need to do that. Maybe I could just go sans make up and, and go and join these other women, which I did. And, that was pretty much the turning point for me where I found that if I selfishly put more focus on what I needed to do, everybody was the winner there. And I'd had a ripple effect just as like, when I was sad, had a ripple effect. If I were happy, that had a ripple effect as well.

Barbara: ([10:58](#))

There was a gym group happening here and I joined and sort of all these friends that I have now, were sort of introduced along the way. I had quite a few years of dealing with an alcoholic husband. The girls were aware of that, so I just definitely would come up with excuses at times not to go out or if I did go out. I think they knew that Barbara is leaving early. Again, I was always

concerned to get out, get home to, I wasn't sure what I was going home to. But they were aware of that, but they're always there the next day and talk about the good parts of that previous evening. I think every one of us have been through ups and downs within the group. Happy Times, sad times.

Barbara: ([11:54](#))

I, myself, I lost a daughter throughout that time. Fran has lost a daughter.

Fran: ([12:02](#))

We lost our beautiful daughter, just going on 20 years ago this year, and I have our good days and my bad days. And as the years went on, more good than bad. But, there's always a day where you cry in the shower, or you, you walk into a shop and they play a song and you have to leave and there's lots of, even today, there's lots of things that spark you off with no particular reason. My way of coping, I have just lots of me time and say running in the mornings when it's dark and no one can see you. And there was this little ad in the paper in the local paper, Mandy was running art classes at the time. And I always loved to paint or draw or sketch and I just thought, that's something kind you need to do for me. I'm so I got to know Mandy through art.

Fran: ([12:58](#))

And she saw me some mornings walking or running on my own, um, early hours of the morning in the dark and said to me, one art class, why dont you come and run or walk with us so you're not on your own. And so pretty much she put her hand out and I said, Oh, that's lovely because we found that was two things we had in common. We both like that. And we both like to exercise, but I guess the friendship I've got with Mandy and how it's helped is because when you paint you just go to a different level, you just sort of get lost and you look at things differently in that you go off into a different world when you paint.

Beverley: ([13:44](#))

But Amanda didn't just help others by teaching them to paint. Many people have opened up to her about their own depression as a result of seeing a self portrait she produced showing herself before and after her depression.

Amanda: ([13:59](#))

I've never done a self portrait before and I've never done one since. This is my one and only self portrait, but I just wanted to be in the middle of that painting with my bad side on one side and my healthy side on the other. Yeah. I want it to be in the middle and I wanted to have it representative, you know, this is where I've been that, but this is where I am now. And I always felt that at my lowest point that if I didn't keep moving forward, this big cloud was going to come from behind me and grab me almost and I saw that in my head as being,

like a fire breathing dragon or a, you know, more than a black dog, more that, something was going to envelop me. If I didn't keep moving forward, I'd, I guess that would be my, my blackness that I'd fall into. So my painting of the dry lake with the dead trees, with the cows in the middle is saying that, you know, that's, that's a sad time. My painting is about Broken Hill. Going to Broken Hill they'll tell you it's so many kilometers, but that's when you get to the post office. That's how, how these things are measured. So I melted the post office clock

Amanda: ([15:13](#))

the border right around my painting is the flowers in full bloom and at their best. And as they go around and go into my sad side, they dry up. And as you can see in mind, my portrait of me, one side is ravaged. That's my sad side. And on the other side I'm nice and healthy.

Amanda: ([15:33](#))

For me to do a painting like that, it takes researching the different images I wanted to get in there. And I wanted that Frieda Carlo Look of, you know, um, sort of front on and looking straight into the camera and you know, defying anybody to argue the point or tell me that I hadn't been through what I'd been through, you know, this is what I've been through and you can tell that by looking around my painting. Well I really am a big believer in that John Lennon quote of life is what happens while you're busy making other plans. I was just getting up every day and putting one foot before the other and going to this little gym group, that had the added advantage. I lost weight, I made new friends. I was eating better. I was drinking more water, I was taking my vitamin and I feel, that sort of, all those things combined. Our trainer, Clem also, you know, he was right into nutrition back then. So we'd have little meetings about nutrition and yeah, just all that Combo of, stuff was what was right for me,

Barbara: ([16:36](#))

For myself. I think I feel a whole lot better if I'm exercising. You know yourself, if you don't eat something correctly or you, you know, you get off track, you feeling, all Yuck, you become bored at home, your stodgy in yourself, you don't, you just don't feel right. Whereas if you make that effort to get up and go to a half past five in the morning class, your days done, by the time you've met with the girls, had the coffee, had a chat. To be part of a group. I need to be in a group to push me, or to, I don't know, I have something to look forward to, to go out and they have their friendship. Catch up with the news of the day, who's who and what's, what and what's going on. We all have that sort of thing.

Fran: ([17:33](#))

Obviously exercise is good for the body and the soul as well and if you've got a healthy body, it keeps your mind healthy. Because otherwise you get more depressed. By exercising and keeping that side of me under control. And of course the other side, by hanging out with the girls, we throw around things, what are you cooking for tea what are we eating? Or I always come out with great recipes and it's really good to bounce off and get great ideas and to try and keep to, I mean we all go off the rails but doesn't hurt to, you know, try and have a healthy lifestyle. And that also definitely helps with the depression side of things as well. Yeah.

Barbara: ([18:20](#))

We go for just social drinks on a Saturday, we try and go to any art gallery functions or the races. It's just being in that group has opened up a lot of other social things that we would not have normally done on their own.

Amanda: ([18:40](#))

My experience from, having friends that may have had depression or I think that may be a little sad is I'm always having an occasion to go to. I guess always having something to look forward to. So in the last few years, I've sort of taken on the leadership of our little gym group and I set the program and, but we also have the other bits that come from that. We have the little social outings. We might go to the art gallery openings when they're on. We may have a traditional get together on a Saturday. But, just take the time. If you think your, your friends may be sad or all be going through depression, you know, everybody's got a tale to tell, but tell your tale at the right time. Listen to this, their stories first. I mean, everybody can add to stories, but if you just ask the right question and then just act like a sponge and, and stand there and listen.

Amanda: ([19:34](#))

I think that's a really, really good way of allowing that person to get their story out into the air. Because that's, that's one of the big things. If you can actually tell your story, it's not a heavy weight as it was if you keep it bottled up inside and you don't share it. So let them share. If I had, had more, more chances to tell my story, I guess, even nowadays rehashing what I went through in high school with friends from those, those days has been very therapeutic for me. Understanding what you go through from somebody else's point of view is, is a great help you know, you're seeing things as all consuming and really important at the time, but it's not if you can get, if you can bounce it off somebody else, like make your story, articulate it and make it an audible thing once it's out of your head and out into the, into the world.

Amanda: ([20:34](#))

Even that can make it not seem as heavy as you might think it is. I sort of feel like it's, when I went back to my high school after, when my child started back at the high school, I went to. The local, like our Broken Hill high school had this great big hall that we'd have socials in and presentation nights and that type of thing. When I went back there after I'd come out as, you know, and had a life experience and was an adult and my child was going into high school, that hall was so small. So you know if you can have the a bit of distance and also sounded off somebody else and just get your story out there. It gives you a different view of things.

Barbara: ([21:16](#))

It's great to have friends to just maybe even push you that little bit or encourage you in your own mind, yeah, the girls all look gorgeous when they go out, get dressed up and go out and have that little bit of fun. Even if it is for one or two hours.

Fran: ([21:33](#))

If you've got a good friend or more than one friend, hang on to them and cherished them. Take good care of yourself. I mean, I still have days where I wake up and thinking, oh, I've got everything I need, Why am I feeling down today? Why do I feel so angry about everything? So then I just try and think of all the beautiful things. And go back to the beautiful memories of my daughter and what my son's doing and what I've achieved and all the goals I'm setting that I'm, and just try and look forward. So I guess that's the main thing. Have some goals and when you're having a bad day, think, oh, what I need to do to kick off that next goal, work towards it.

Barbara: ([22:25](#))

I'm aware of the benefits of lifeline and I would advise someone if they don't have a personal friend to help them through. Certainly go and seek one of these good living sorts of counsellor maybe, not to try and get it, get through on your own if you're not handling it. Seek advice from somewhere.

Amanda: ([22:48](#))

So I have this painting here and I think, um, I always told myself, it's, you know, you've got to, you can't go backwards. You've got to keep moving forward. And I don't ever want to feel like that black cloud's going to come and put its arms around me ever again. So I still get up at five and I still meet my girlfriends at five 30. That's my sanity. I have always felt that that's my sanity from the time, I used to shove Lauren into a pusher and we'd walk for eight ks.

Amanda: ([23:17](#))

As soon as I drop Alex off at school off we'd go on this big circuit and end up back at our house. But that was just sanity. Exercise is just such a great cathartic thing for your head. You know, they've been out there in nature and having such a great place to walk around as Broken Hill that, you know, you can definitely avoid the hills. They're right in the middle. You just walk out there on the periphery. But , yeah, I just want to keep moving forward. I remember flying, with the kids for a long weekend up to Brisbane just to see a Picasso retrospective. That's what you do when you live in somewhere so remote, you have to put yourself out there and make the journey. But Picasso didn't start drawing the one line stuff that he ended up doing. All artists start somewhere and end up somewhere completely different and I, so I think that that's what your life journey is about as well. You know, you'll have a look at anybody's life journey and it's like a retrospective of a, of a painter or any artist. They start somewhere, but they end up somewhere completely different.

Beverley: ([24:24](#))

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