# “The simple, difficult truth is that the effects have been devastating for all of us…”

When I was 11, my dad told me about his alcohol dependence. I remember him sitting on the end of my bed, doing his best to make it make sense.

Pieces of early memories started falling into place. It suddenly became clear why my brother and I struggled to wake him in the evenings while our mum was at work. Why our family took so many evening drives to what appeared to be a magical old fairy tale home in the hills, but was actually a rehabilitation clinic. Why he smelled different when he hugged me. Why he lashed out.

As he spoke, he used words I hadn’t heard before. *Alcoholic*. *Addiction*. *Rehab*.

I have a lifelong love of words. As a kid, I usually had a pen in my hand, writing stories and terrible joke books, and crafting letters to my cousins. I loved to read and learn about English and other languages. I’ve built a career around words too, working in communications for close to 20 years.

I now work at FARE. When the opportunity came to join the team last year, I jumped at it. Of all the jobs I’ve had, it was the first to combine two things that have fundamentally shaped who I am: my passion for words and my experiences of alcohol harm.

A big part of FARE’s work is to raise the voices of people in our community affected by alcohol harm. Real-life stories show us the people behind the statistics, creating a space for understanding, collaboration and eventually – hopefully – change.

As I’m learning, there are **so many** stories out there.

Many are just like mine and my family’s – people who’ve watched on with a profound sense of helplessness at the steady physical, mental and emotional decline of someone they care about. Others who have first-hand understanding of what it is to be among the one in ten Australians with an alcohol use disorder – and the stigma, shame and isolation it can bring. People who’ve experienced alcohol-related violence. Those who’ve lost a loved one.

Really, when it comes to alcohol, we all have a story to tell. How can we not when we live in a culture saturated by its presence – in the places we socialise, the advertising and media we see, the sport we watch, the stores we visit?

Alcohol remains part of my dad’s story. I’ve spent a long time trying to understand how it’s shaped his life, mine and my family’s. The simple, difficult truth is that the effects have been devastating for all of us, in different ways at different times. It’s complex and it’s been painful. I’m lucky to have had support and encouragement to look at and work through what it’s meant for me, a long-term process that continues to give me new insights.

When my daughter turned 11 recently, I couldn’t help but reflect on my experiences at that age. I was grateful to realise how different hers will be. Like any parent, my hope is that her life and my 13-year-old son’s will be free from something as preventable as alcohol harm.

It’ll take time and effort to change the story of alcohol in Australia. We need to understand the realities of the many ways it’s affecting so many of us, directly or indirectly. We need to have honest – even confronting – conversations about just how widespread and damaging the harm can be.

And to do this, we need to keep sharing our experiences. We have a greater chance of reducing alcohol harm in Australia if we can write the next chapters together.

*In the coming months, we will be regularly sharing stories like Jane’s on our website.* [*Sign up to the FARE e-mail list*](https://fare.org.au/action/) *to receive future stories.*

*If you have experiences to share – short or long – that can help people know they are not alone, please share your story through the* [*Voices of Change project*](https://fare.org.au/voicesofchange/)*.*