

## Victoria Brace

Ruby Rousell

Hope is the last remaining spark of light when a fire dies. It is a necessity for all human beings.

When I first laid eyes on Victoria Brace I knew my life would change. I had always thought I was straight, so it was a traumatic time. At first, both my family and friends were shocked. No-one had foreseen it. Victoria and I were intensely attached — practically inseparable. Although she supported me, she was also the cause of great frustration. Throughout our year together, she became incredibly possessive.

Who was Victoria Brace? Why were we so close? This is our story.

I remember the final day of my 14th winter vividly. It marked the moment my eyes caught sight of a nearby mirror and time seemed to stop. The girl who faced me had a distinct curve in her body, causing her right hip to protrude in a horrific fashion. The discovery led me to my local doctor, before the real journey began. After an eternity of X-rays and appointments, it was concluded that I had “idiopathic scoliosis”. Once translated from the medical discourse, this referred to the fact that, as I grew, my spine had unnaturally twisted, causing my hips to rotate. I would have to wear a back brace for a year or face permanent cosmetic deformity.

I had always watched disfigured people with ashamed fascination. Now I was on the brink of deformity. The deeper I became involved in this alien world, the more horrific it seemed. I discovered that a spine could curve to an extent

which would crush internal organs. I had reached the point where this was more than a cosmetic problem — in my mind, I was clinging to life. I faced an abyss of uncertainty — found myself on the lip of a volcano. Hope was the only key to my sanity.

I was stripped down to my underwear and made to lie on a thin strap of rubber while my body was engulfed in plaster and, once dried, a colossal knife was used to free me from the mould. I realised the great extent of hope, strength and perseverance that would be involved in this process. Adjusting to my new life was almost unbearable. There were two ways I could have handled the situation: helplessly scream and sob to no avail, or treat the condition as a mental journey — accept my plight with dignity. I chose the latter. As I sat, perfectly erect in my room, I began to play my new stomach as a drum. This marked the moment where I chose laughter over tears. I named my brace after the Victorian era, when it was the height of fashion to wear corsets similar to my fibreglass friend. Time passed. All the while I remained certain that I would soon be free. I lived in hope.

Summer arrived and I was forced to wear three layers to a school which lacked airconditioning. I was almost driven to insanity. Other obstacles also endeavoured to drag me into the depths of despair — along with my back brace, I needed braces on my teeth. I already had glasses and I was beginning to feel like “Bio-Mechanical Woman”. Gorgeous ... My hope was fading fast. That was when I met him.

He was two years older than me. I was a musician — he was a sportsman. I was pale while he was tanned. But we both endured scoliosis. He had finished his “back brace” time, while mine had merely begun. I had found a mentor. Because of him, I managed to struggle on. My flame of hope grew higher and, before I knew it, the summer turned into autumn, which became winter. Suddenly spring had arrived and my 15th birthday marked the beginning of my newfound freedom. I knew I had reached the end of the chain when I became the mentor for a young girl embarking on her “scoliosis journey”.

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She will one day give hope to another who has to face a year's confinement. The cycle will continue.

Two years have passed since I removed my corset. Victoria now lies alone on the top shelf of my cupboard. Our time together was difficult, yet undeniably memorable. Although euphoric when it was over, I have no regrets about my time with Victoria — for it was she who taught me to hold on to hope.



**Ruby Rousell** wrote this essay in 2007 when she was in Year 12 at Indooroopilly High School, Indooroopilly, Queensland.