

FACING HER FIRE

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Sophie Marsh is a writer, a creator, a muse, a blonde bombshell—but she is so much more than that archetype suggests.

At just 21 years old Sophie is an insightful and incredibly self-aware young woman—who just so happens to have over 12.6k Instagram followers. Within the 625 squares that she has shared so far on the platform are artistic shots of the Australian countryside, snaps of crystal clear ocean water, joyful film photos of her friends and of course—striking selfies. Amongst this though, she diverges from the primarily superficial content that satiates the social media sphere, including honest pieces of writing that feel like a glimpse into an open diary—which sometimes they quite literally are. Her posts range from poetry to journal excerpts, reflecting on self-love, acceptance and her mental-health struggles.



In a recent caption, Sophie expressed her struggle with body image: “a part of me will always want to have clearer skin, grow longer legs, and not enjoy pasta so much”. She went on to explain though that “when I look at the people I love, the reasons I love them have nothing to do with how slim their waistlines are or how strong their jaw is”.

“I’ve battled with the concept of why anyone is following me” Sophie explains. “I didn’t set the intention of creating a following”.

But through Instagram, Sophie has become a role model for young women—her innate strength and penchant for profound honesty make it easy for others to connect with her.

“The magic of following Sophie’s account is that she is so real—it’s hard to come by such honesty on social media” explains Jaya Ruzans, one of Sophie’s long-time Instagram followers. “She made me realise that I’m not alone in my struggles, that it’s totally normal to have bad days.” The young woman explained in a private message correspondence that she appreciates having someone to look up to on Instagram that shares their challenges and “doesn’t just show their highlight reel.”

Sophie’s vulnerability with her thousands of online followers is a true testament to her maturity, which is further proven when only 15 minutes into our conversation she began describing some of the most challenging parts of her life. She spoke about her “tumultuous childhood” where she moved

around constantly, explaining that “my parents worked very hard, so their absence was only out of pure necessity to keep food on the table” but which meant that she “grew up with this sense [of being] inevitably alone”. Sophie says that she realised this at 12 and “still thinks that it’s true”, adding that “you’re the only one that’s got your back at the end of the day.”

Without faltering, she went on to explain how that theory was “tested and tried while navigating the world of school and the landscape of boys and parties”.

“When I was 17, I was sexually assaulted for the first time,” she said. “I thought that it was honestly the beginning of the end for me”.

Sophie is not alone. According to the Queensland Sexual Assault Network, 4,751 women reported that they were assaulted in 2017. These statistics do not even paint the full picture, as a vast number of victims choose not to report their assault. RAINN, an American non-profit anti-sexual assault organisation, details that only 230 out of every 1000 cases are reported to police— that means about 75% of sexual violence instances go unreported.

Sophie continued to describe how dark things got for her after the assault, detailing how she grappled with severe mental health issues—a common reaction to this form of trauma as outlined by Queensland Health.

“I’d constructed this idea of the life I was going to live and when that fell apart it was like

my whole identity kind of fell apart with it". She reveals how she felt that "we live in a society that values instancy—quick fixes and shortcuts and so in the three years after that event I didn't really believe there was going to be a resolution. I didn't think there was going to be a light at the end of the tunnel, because if there was why wasn't it available right now?"

Sophie articulates the loneliness she felt, "having no one there to hold my hand and tell me that it was a process and that it was going to [take time]". Without a trace of vitriol, she explains that since she was living away from home and acting out that her family were "at a loss" and couldn't understand how to help her. She discusses how there's not enough education or understanding of these challenges in society, highlighting that this is a major issue for youth today.

She goes on to explain that "I feel like I'm very lucky to have faced that at such an early age because it has given me resilience and tools that a lot of other people may never be aware of and may always be lacking because they're not facing the fire in such a head-on way." Her ability to find positive aspects of an otherwise terrible experience is indicative of her strength—and of that exact resilience that she speaks of.

Her struggle with trauma and mental health challenges in her formative and recent years led her to develop cognitive strategies to overcome them and look inwards for healing. "I was made to feel like I had no

other choice but to be medicated... that began my will to prove that there was another way," she said. Sophie identified that the main problem was the lack of support and spaces for people like her that were struggling which inspired her to explore options that weren't necessarily instant.

Blog 'Diary of Femme' is the passion project that she co-created in 2018 intending to support, inspire and challenge other youth. The community, which comprises of the web blog and Instagram account, is centralised on the concept of growth, a space to "give people access to education, tips and challenges", she explains that it's important to "balance those things delicately in order to create better support for people". Diary of Femme is about "asking questions and collaborating, rather than coming in from an angle of being a guru or knowing all there is to know" she explains realistically. Although the blog is currently undergoing changes, the Instagram account for Diary of Femme remains a source of inspiration for many youth, a safe haven in the otherwise overwhelm of shallow content on social media.

Likewise on her own Instagram account, she provides content that intimately documents her growth through grief, from a lost teenager to the mature and self-appreciating women that she is consistently working towards becoming. A snippet of her body of writing titled 'tragic', that she posted online in 2017, provides a glimpse into her mind at its darkest— "raw, tired eyes don't

see any less, they just hurt more at what they do” she poetically recounts. Adversely, in a post from April this year, Sophie weaved a beautiful tale of rejuvenation— “It’s Autumn. My leaves are changing colour, I’m lighter now, I care more.”

Sophie Marsh’s sincerity is a form of resistance in and of itself against the current structure of society, and her grace in sharing the good and the bad so openly inspires others to show their true selves. She leads by example, speaking eloquently on tough subject matters and shows the value of vulnerability in connecting with and supporting others. With the upcoming relaunch of the Diary of Femme blog, Sophie shows she is always reflecting and improving on her previous creations. We can’t wait to see more from this intelligent, inspiring, introspective woman who is guaranteed to make changes in the world.