



Australian
Childhood
Foundation

Bella's Story

by Makeysha and Skye
illustrated by Jess Racklyeft





The Australian Childhood Foundation provides counselling to children and young people who are recovering from hurt or hard things happening. This story was crafted by Makeysha and Skye. Makeysha is the young person who co-wrote the story with Skye who is the counsellor that helped Makeysha to write it. Their perspectives are described at the end of the story. We have created this book together and are distributing it at their joint request.

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This story was written by two authors as a part of a therapeutic journey together. It is a story about lifting out of the darkness and learning to live in the light.

Once upon a time there was a young bear called Bella. Bella lived in a cave in a dark forest with some of her family. In the dark forest there were some of her aunties and cousins. They were good bears, but they were stuck on the dark side. Bella's mum and dad had been here, but now they were in a faraway land. Bella's mum and dad had gone to find others to help them, but all the others said "No", when they asked for help. Bella's parents desperately needed help to find food and somewhere nice to live, but nobody would help them.



Bella was sad; she was sad that the others would not help. Bella felt angry and anxious. Bella's mum had never experienced anything but a dangerous world. She didn't know that she didn't have to live in a dangerous world, so she stayed there. Bella, too, was stuck in a dark and dangerous world. But Bella was different, Bella knew there was a chance of something different; Bella knew that she didn't belong here.



All around Bella was darkness. There were big spikey trees. The spikes fell from the trees and scattered across the land. There were spikes everywhere. The sun rarely shone in the dark forest. Sometimes Bella would peep out of her cave to see if trees had grown green leaves yet, but they never had. Their large dark form would stare back at her and Bella would run fast back into her cave. Bella never heard the sounds of birds singing or frogs chirping. She listened for life in the forest, a friend maybe to keep her company, give her comfort even. But Bella found herself feeling alone. Her family were there, but her family were busy. Her family did not seem to care about finding the frogs and birdsong. They did not seem to question where the sun had gone.



There may not have been birdsong, but there were noises. Scary noises. The kind of noises that make you jump. The kind of noises that make you wonder, and not in a good way. Sometimes the kind of noises that make your body freeze in terror. Feeling scared became normal for Bella. Bella would lay awake at night and hear loud thudding sounds against the cave walls. Her cave was meant to be her safe place, but it never felt safe. When Bella heard scary noises and sensed danger, she would bury herself deeper into the cave. She would try to find any safety she could, but safety still never came. Sometimes Bella would hide food, enough for weeks. Sometimes she would run out of food and stay hungry for days.



One day, Bella was hiding deep in her cave when she saw a bright light bouncing around near the doorway. Bella felt surprised. She tingled with a new feeling, excitement. Bella crept slowly towards the door. There bouncing in front of her was a large ball of light.

"What are You?" asked Bella.

"Are You a fallen star? I have never seen a star before.
We do not have stars in the dark forest.
Or are You a speck of light from the missing sun?"



The light seemed to get excited. It swirled above her head and danced in front of her. The light cracked wide open and invited Bella inside of it. Bella stepped inside. Inside the light there was yummy food and drinks. It was warm. Bella felt safe, like she was wrapped in a warm hug. Bella felt at one with this ball of light.



The light bounced Bella through the dark forest, careful not to wake up all the others who lived there. The forest felt like a deep pit of darkness, full of spikes.

'It feels dangerous out here' whispered Bella. **'Those spikeY trees look like teeth about to eat me.'** she quivered. The ball of light held Bella in its warmth, shielding her against the chill of the forest. Bella still felt scared, but the light was helping her to feel safer.



The light bounced along for what felt like hours. Then Bella noticed that the sky had started to appear a bit brighter. Here in the light forest, there was a warm, bright sun. There were big trees with huge green leaves. Flowers, all the colours of the rainbow, filled the forest floor. Bella smelt something sweet in the air. It was yummy blackberries. Bella picked one and ate one; it tasted delicious. Bella started to feel a bit safer, she even sensed a feeling of happiness travelling through her body.



Light filled the air, and there was music all around them. Birdsong and frogs dancing; rivers flowing, leaves rustling, crickets chatting. This new forest was alive in so many beautiful ways. The light led Bella to a den, a den made by bears. It was there that Bella saw her bear aunty collecting wood for a fire. **'Aunty Ella Bear?'** called Bella. 'Bella!' replied her aunty, bounding towards her and wrapping her in a big bear hug. 'Please come inside Bella.'



Bella was surprised and happy. She followed her bear aunty into the bear den. It was bright and shiny new. There were beds with colourful covers and pictures of Bella and her sisters on the wall. It felt comfy and so much safer than her cold, dark cave. 'Can I stay here?' asked Bella. 'This is your home,' said her aunty. Bella snuggled into her bear home. There was always fresh water to drink; food to eat; and sunshine to warm their backs, whilst they snoozed in the grass after a long day playing.



Bella still worried though, and she still felt scared. She felt scared that the spikey trees would come and find her, maybe even take over her land. Sometimes she heard noises in the night and she thought the darkness was back. She would jump up ready to find somewhere to hide. She had gotten so good at kicking into action really fast to make sure nothing could hurt her. Even though Bella loved her new life, she also carried so many difficult memories and so many uncomfortable feelings in her body. It was hard sometimes to truly believe she was safe. Bella's biggest fear was that there was going to be no food and that she might find herself without anywhere to live.



One day, Bella was hiding food in her bedroom when her aunty came in and sat beside her.

'I am wondering what you need all this food for?' asked her aunty.

'I want to be prepared this time,' said Bella.

'Prepared?' questioned her aunty, gently.

'I want to be prepared for if all the frightening things of the dark forest find us. I need to keep us safe and to make sure we have food.'

'I am the one who needs to keep you safe,' replied her aunty. 'I need to show you that we are; we are safe now, Bella, and I will protect you.

Come outside with me.'



Bella's aunty scooped her up in her big bear arms and carried her into the sunshine. It was summertime and together they smelt the blackberries in the summer's air. They watched the birds fluttering from branch to branch and the branches softly swaying in the breeze. They listened to the bird song and even tried to sing along too. They listened to the crickets. Bella listened hard as she knew they had special messages of joy and adventure.



‘Everything we see, hear, smell and feel here is real Bella; this is all real. This is all ours. The life you see here is stronger and far more powerful than the dark forest. I will bring you out here every day and we will listen to the birdsong and smell the fruits of the forest together. I will bring you here every day until you start to believe that this is where you truly belong, that all this is yours.’ Bella felt warm and safe in her bear auntie’s arms, listening to the soft rumble of her voice. Bella had found a way into the light and although she knew there was a long journey ahead, she was starting to feel better already.



Messages from the authors

Bella wrote her parts of the story from the light side looking back. She felt very scared to tell her story ... because she was on the dark side and had never told her story before. For Bella, telling her story was surprising. Some of the surprised feeling came from the mix of feeling both scared and happy. Bella said it felt good having her co-author and counsellor with her... 'it helped me feel calmer.' Bella's aunty asked people to come and help her. Real people came to hear Bella's story and they listened to everything she has to say. Then they came back with the cameras and they put her story on the news, for the whole world to hear. Now Bella can tell the whole world her story. Then she can get more help and people will understand her. Bella thinks that this story will help other children to tell their story

'Maybe it will make them not so scared to tell their story.'

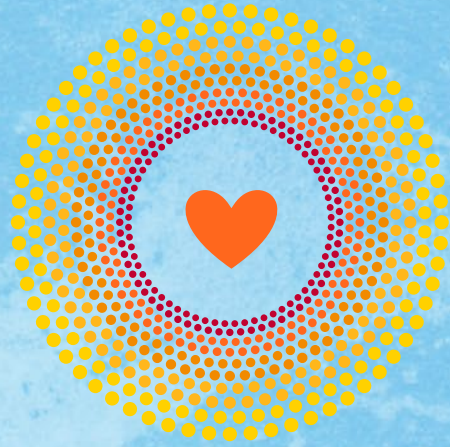
Makeysha

11 years old

When I wrote the original Bella story, I wrote it for all the children who have been through similar dark times as Bella. I want you to know you are not alone. As you journey through the story, every person's dark forest and cave is going to look and feel a little different. Everyone's light is going to look and feel different too. The magical thing about stories is that they take us deep inside ourselves. We can learn a lot about ourselves in this space. It can help us, and those around us, to learn more about the world we are in and how that world feels to us.

The stories we love, and the stories we tell, are created from our dreams; hopes; wishes; and all that we hold true. When we share our stories with others, in a safe space, we share parts of ourselves that we may only just be discovering. Stories are so powerful; they carry messages and meaning. Together, we can also use story to create new meanings and new realities. Joining hands with one brave Bella really can help change the world.

Skye



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