

BURNT FACE

SCARRED FOR LIFE

IT WAS A DAY WHICH STARTED WITH SMILES AND ENDED WITH SCARS.

A sobering reminder that life can change in the blink of an eye, without warning, without provocation or prejudice.

From that frightful day, the road ahead was both painful and challenging, yet, Annette Swann's story isn't one of self-pity, but one of strength, survival and learning self-love.

Growing up in Victoria, Annette's life changed at a corporate Christmas barbecue. She was nine years old, when the negligent actions of one of the adults present resulted in an explosion which engulfed Annette in flames.

"My mum was a fair distance away and looked across at the commotion and thought it was a girl with red hair dancing. She then realised it was me and that I was on fire," Annette said.

The split-second stupidity of one man scarred 30% of Annette's body, resulting in two or three skin graft operations each week as Annette suffered in hospital for two months. She left hospital covered in a thick ointment and wrapped in bandages with a plaster neck collar, felt compression chin strap and splint on her left arm. This was her appearance for the next two years.

Fearing Annette would become a recluse if she stayed at home, she was sent back to school within two weeks after leaving hospital. Relentless bullying ensued with comments such as "freak" a daily occurrence, but the one which hurt most was the chant, "burnt face, burnt face."

"It was the one that really got to me, which is why I chose it for the name of my book. It doesn't own me anymore, I own it," she said.

Annette's story, *Burnt Face*, tells of her ordeal growing up in the notorious suburb of Broadmeadows, known for boisterous youth and gangs during the 70s and 80s. She rebelled against bullying by becoming one herself, choosing strength and survival over torment and torture.



"I wanted to belong, to be accepted. I became outspoken, assertive and on some occasions, aggressive. I made some bad choices, but ultimately, it was about survival and self-defense. The story really delves within the feelings I had growing up as a teenager with facial scars and to deliver a message to other teenagers who are being bullied, to believe in yourself. I know it's hard now, but trust that it will get better, because it does.

"Love yourself for who you are, scars or 'imperfections' and all, because it's those differences that make you individual, interesting and special. Once you learn to love yourself, others will love you and you'll make positive choices. Life does get better, trust me," Annette said.

Above all else, Annette hopes that her story will allow her own mum to forgive herself.

"I want my mum to stop blaming herself for what happened. She was my saviour through everything, she gave me my strength. I want to thank her for everything she's ever done for me."

Annette's account of her journey is truly inspirational, a must-read for anyone who has faced bullying in their life.

The official launch for her novel, *Burnt Face*, is at the Northern Beaches Bowls Club, on October 11, from 5pm until 6:30pm. Mayor Greg Williamson, is a guest of honour and Annette will be available for book signings. *Burnt Face* can be purchased at the launch, or pre-order yours now on the website;

www.annetteswann.com/burntface