Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Finding My Voice

by Mala Davangere Hiremath

"We would have forgiven Dad for leaving if he hadn't taken the dog, but..."

I'm staring at the sentence, waiting for inspiration. I have plenty of thoughts, but getting them onto paper is another matter. I'm struggling to find my voice. It's been so quiet, and finding it has been difficult—not helped, I suppose, by being teased on my first day of school.

I remember being rounded up and pushed into the middle of a ring of other children holding hands, so I couldn't escape. They danced around me, singing "Brown Girl in the Ring". In later years, I discovered that it was a playground ring game originating in Jamaica, where children hold hands in a circle while one girl steps into the centre to dance her best moves.

Being the star of the show was terrifying, and I wasn't showing them my best moves... and I certainly wasn't wearing enough sequins! I loved everything about Boney M. It was a family favourite.

Recently, reconnecting with my sisters has opened conversations about parts of our family story that were hidden for a long time. It has made me think about how much can go unspoken and how important it is to listen to one another.

I don't need to put every private detail on the page, but those conversations have made me think about the stories we carry. Perhaps this is my conflict: I want to speak, but I'm still learning not to silence myself.

I want to write, but I keep waiting for the perfect first sentence.

It may be a long wait. Why is it so difficult? A dog always knows what it wants, doesn't it? I still haven't worked out what to do with him!

Over the years, I've read every self-help book, practised yoga and meditation, and experienced many different types of therapy, most recently art therapy and somatic EMDR. EMDR stands for eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing.

It sounds complicated, but in effect, it is very simple. Tapping out the trauma and learning to feel safe have been priorities.

Being able to share stories with my sisters, layering our perspectives on different times in our lives and catching up with one another in the present, has made all the inner work worthwhile.

We share in the silent suffering, as well as our love of dancing and sequins.

When my sister-in-law finally allowed me to choose some of my mother's silk saris, I gathered all the loose gold sequins from the bottom of one of the original suitcases my parents brought with them from India. It was heavy and reinforced with wood, lined with vibrant pink Indian cotton and marked with my father's name.

My brother decided the suitcase belonged to him.

He never joined in our dance routines.

He was never invited.

I'm looking forward to shared holidays with my sisters and writing a new pathway for us. So, I'm here to try something new: to find a voice for our shared stories of the missing years, when conflict, silence and a lack of truth prevailed.

We have shifted our perspectives. My dad always told us that patience is a virtue. I'm not sure I agree with that.