



CITY OF MELBOURNE

A WALL OF NOS

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Submissions are anonymous

23. *I said no to the last person I dated and it ultimately ended things. She wanted an open relationship. I didn't. Part of me really wanted to say yes, so it wouldn't end. But I've given into things that previous partners have wanted before and it has come at a huge personal expense. I was sad things ended, but it was good to say no.*

24. *When I think about the times I have said NO. The difficult ones that stick hard and brittle in my heart. NO to others - Father, lover, friend - have actually been about saying yes to myself. Yes I am creating a boundary. A boundary where I stand - here for myself.*

25. *Growing up I was taught that "no" was a rude word, a bad word, a selfish word. It was best to avoid saying no at all costs, for fear of hurting others or appearing impolite. For years now, whenever I'm asked if I'm okay, my response always is, yes. Good times or bad, my instinct is to avoid saying no. After recently being diagnosed with depression I think it's time to admit the answer is no.*

26. *I had changed psychiatric medication six times in one year and my psychiatrist wanted me to change again even though I had only been on my most recent one for a few weeks. I had wanted to try the current medication for so long, but I changed it. I wish I had said no. I stayed on my old medication. Two days later I overdosed.*

27. *The first day I met you, you offered me a lift home. I wish I said no.*

28. *A few years ago I said no to ever seeing my mother's abusive husband again. I refuse to tolerate his vile behaviour. I refuse to pretend that it isn't unacceptable and poisonous. I refuse to act like it hasn't done harm, to me and my family. As a kid my "no's" were ignored but as an adult I have the power to walk away. No more.*

29. *When our relationship faded and reached the end, he asked me for one last night together. It no longer felt right but I didn't want to hurt him anymore so I said nothing and let him in.*

30. *As a kid being overweight felt dangerous. And it was. I was constantly reminded of my lack of worth. It felt like my life didn't really start until I lost the weight. I have spent years saying no to certain foods as a way of controlling my body. And therefore trying to control how I move through this world.*



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31. *I have been struggling to find my own voice for years. I am living as a minority (I'm a Chinese Indonesian and Catholic) in a country where intolerance and violence towards certain religions are quite high. You have to work and push everything ten times harder. The day I started to say "no (I do not care)" to people's judgement based on my identity was my liberation day.*

32. *I was 16. My Grandfather waited until my family had left to confront me. Calling me ungrateful, a brat, a whore. Saying my family deserved better. No he was wrong. No I did nothing to deserve his tirade. No to misogyny. No to bullying. No to familial abuse.*

33. *For me, as a woman of colour, my most powerful 'no' isn't a discreet incident or an isolated choice. It's an arduous process of unlearning; of uprooting every myth that White Australia sowed in my childhood. It's saying 'nope' to Austin, and 'HELL YES' to Arundhati.*

34. *The "no's" I have grappled with are the ones I have to continually say to myself. No – you will not keep making yourself small. No – you will not tolerate that person. No – you will not sell yourself short over and over again for fear of being "too much" or "not enough." Just, no.*

35.

A "friend" who, after plying me with drinks, said:

"Of course, we're going to have sex"

as he stole a kiss

from my lips

and before I could deny

the pressure he applied

he pulled away and smiled;

I didn't get to say

I revile

your self-assured possession

of someone who trusted you

36. *Comparing the storybook Father with my own, taught me the hard way to learn acceptance. The day I said no to any expectations of him was the day our relationship became valued by both of us. Expect nothing and the rest is a bonus.*



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37.

Endless scripts, sending chemicals into my bloodstream.

I should have said No.

Encouraged again to lay bare before the scalpel.

I should have said No.

Sovereignty over my body—

it's slipping through my fingers;

your confidence buries my intuition;

and I cannot see a clear ending.

I should have said No.

38. *Sometimes when I'm riding my bike passing cars yell abuse. The first time it happened I did nothing but the second time, I pedaled fast and caught them at the lights. I yelled "Oy! I have feelings! NO ONE needs your abuse." The guys inside looked guilty and mumbled "Sorry".*

39. *I said yes to an open relationship while I was overseas for a year studying, but no to him sleeping with a particular person because I was worried about their friendship. He slept with her anyway, started a 7 month affair and manipulated, gaslit and lied to me the whole time. It was the only time I'd said "no" to anything significant in the 3 years we'd dated.*

40. *A male friend asked me to make out with him because, he argued, I had "made out with lots of friends before". I said no. But he persisted, and eventually I gave in because I started to feel bad for him. It was the most repulsive kiss.*

41. *Pressured by the big family, my mother asked me to consider inviting my unfaithful father to my wedding. In honour of me and her, I said no. She stood alone bravely on that day.*

42. *Realising that saying NO to relationships that don't value my worth, my strength, my intelligence - all things I have worked hard for – means I get to say YES down the road, when someone sees me, appreciates my idiosyncrasies and doesn't try to dilute me down to their strength.*

43. *I have often found it hard to say no. I have been scared of disappointing someone or hurting their feelings. I have often said 'yes', 'maybe', or nothing when I wanted to say no. I'm teaching myself how to say no and have it mean something.*

44. *I am a walking "no".*



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45. *I was taught to be a people pleaser. That women exist to make things better – to soothe, placate and nurture. Mostly this way worked - until it didn't. I can never un-see the misogynistic bullshit that underpins this idea. I can never go back.*

46. *I could never say no to you. But sometimes I wish you had to me.*

47. *My Mum would pat my bottom every time I walked past her. I told her 'no' and asked her to stop every time. She ignored me. I avoided walking past her and never had my back to her. I didn't feel safe around her and my boundaries were broken.*

48. *When I was 7, a man I loved and trusted placed my hands on him in a way that he had no business doing. I couldn't speak. I didn't say no because words of shock were flashing in my brain and couldn't make their way to my mouth. I got up and ran and locked myself in the bathroom. That was my no.*

49. *In my last relationship my "no's" were always spoken quietly, haltingly. That's because every time they came out strong and set a boundary, my partner reacted negatively, often shutting me out. I was so unsure of where I stood that I became outwardly compliant, while my "no's" screamed at the back of my throat.*

50. *Growing up in the 1980's the only notion of 'No' I was ever taught was in relation to drugs and premarital sex. It took me years to learn how to tune in to myself and decide whether I really wanted to do something or if I felt expected/ conditioned or guilted into complying. Even now I still have feelings of guilt whenever I do say no, but I now give myself permission to.*

51. *I was catching up with an old friend at a house party. This guy that I have felt uncomfortable around approached us. A few years ago he was very persistent with another female friend and me, even when we politely said no to him. While I was mid-sentence talking to my friend he said, "Can I interrupt?" I immediately said, "No." And it felt great. He walked away.*

52.

Let me walk you through this painfully.

A girl walks home alone at night

A girl walks home alone at night smoking a cigarette in case she needs to burn someone

A girl walks home alone at night smoking a cigarette and then is not alone because

four separate men at four separate spots

on the girl's walk home – which should be alone – they

lean into her leer and

in slurred French

demand cigarettes

Non! she says

before scuttling off to resume walking home alone