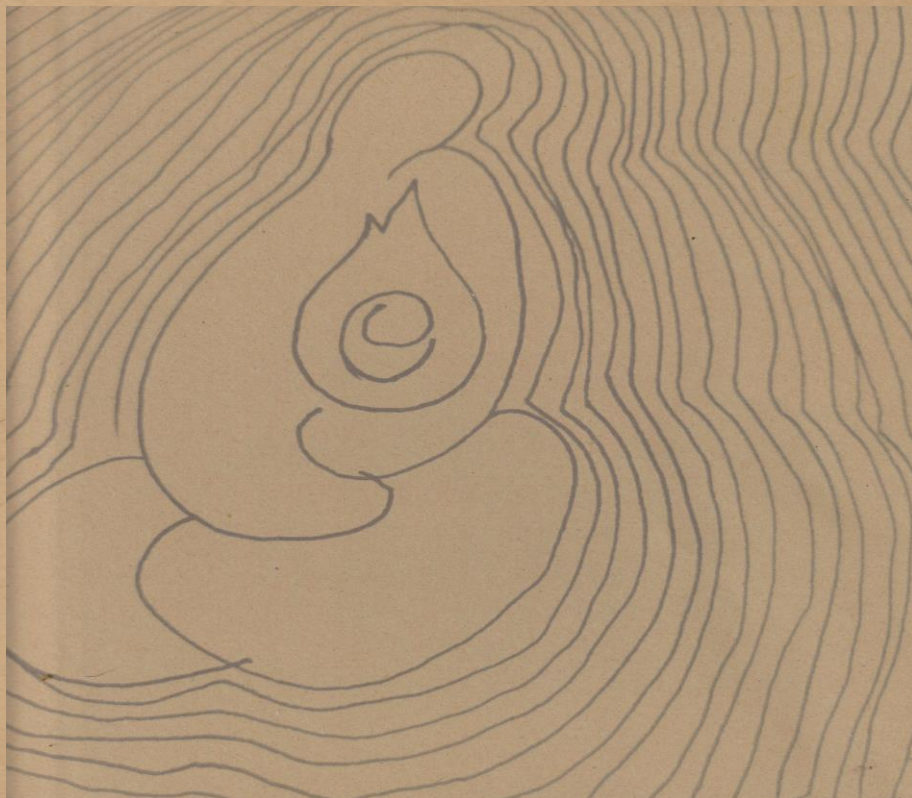


**Mighty Kombucha
Mother and
Shapeshifting
Sister Willow**



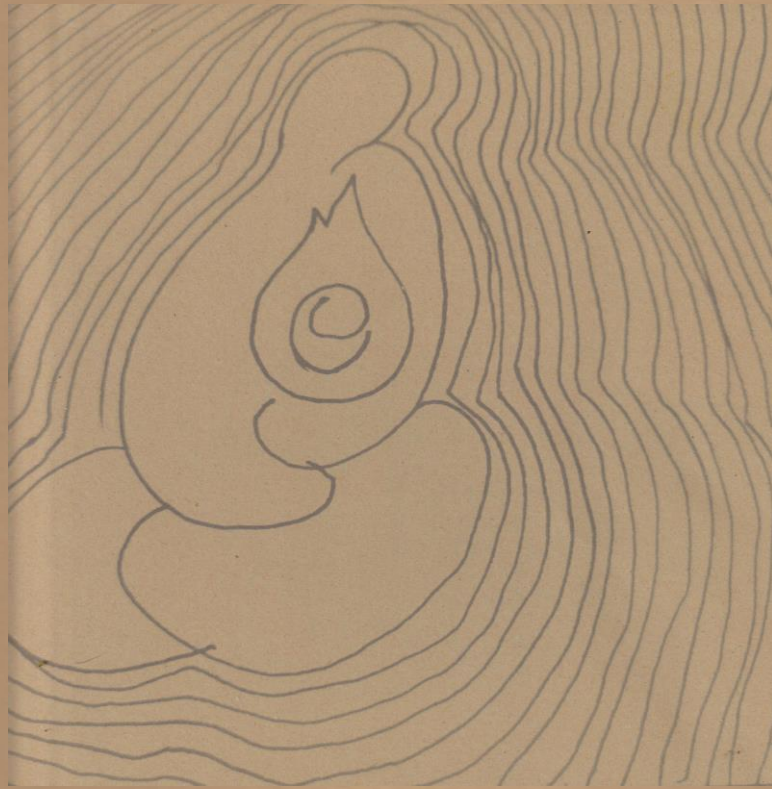
Caroline Fortune

The image features two bundles of dried lavender flowers, one on the left and one on the right, set against a light brown, textured background. The lavender is a deep purple color, and the stems are thin and woody. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

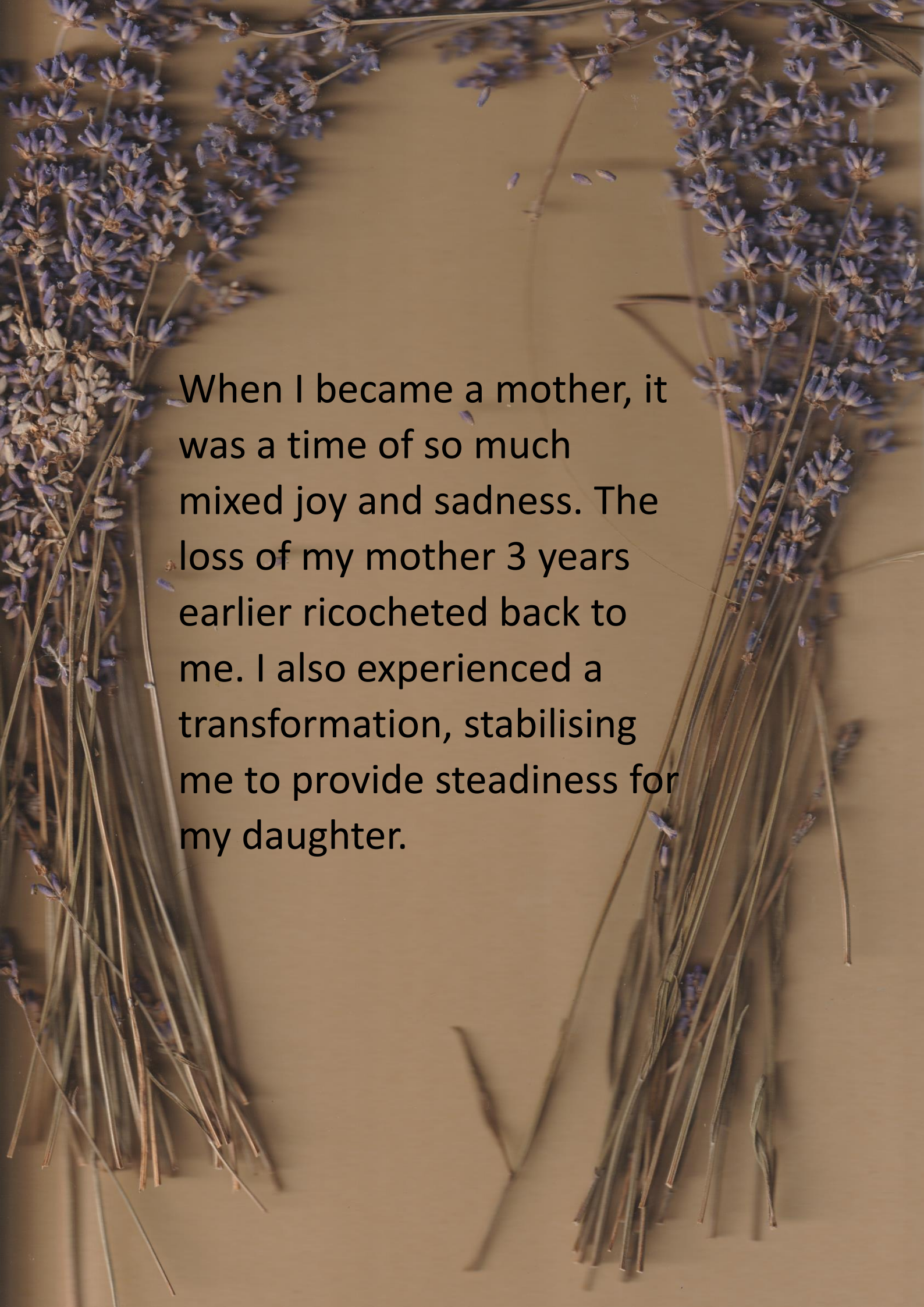
• *This story is for
my mum, Rose*

When I was a little girl, I often felt lost. I had a sense of unsteadiness to the ground I walked on. I'd often dream that I was racing up an invisible slide in the field beyond the house I grew up in, and when I got to the top, I became a bird and could fly. However, in many of these dreams, I'd get caught in telephone wires, and I'd wake up.

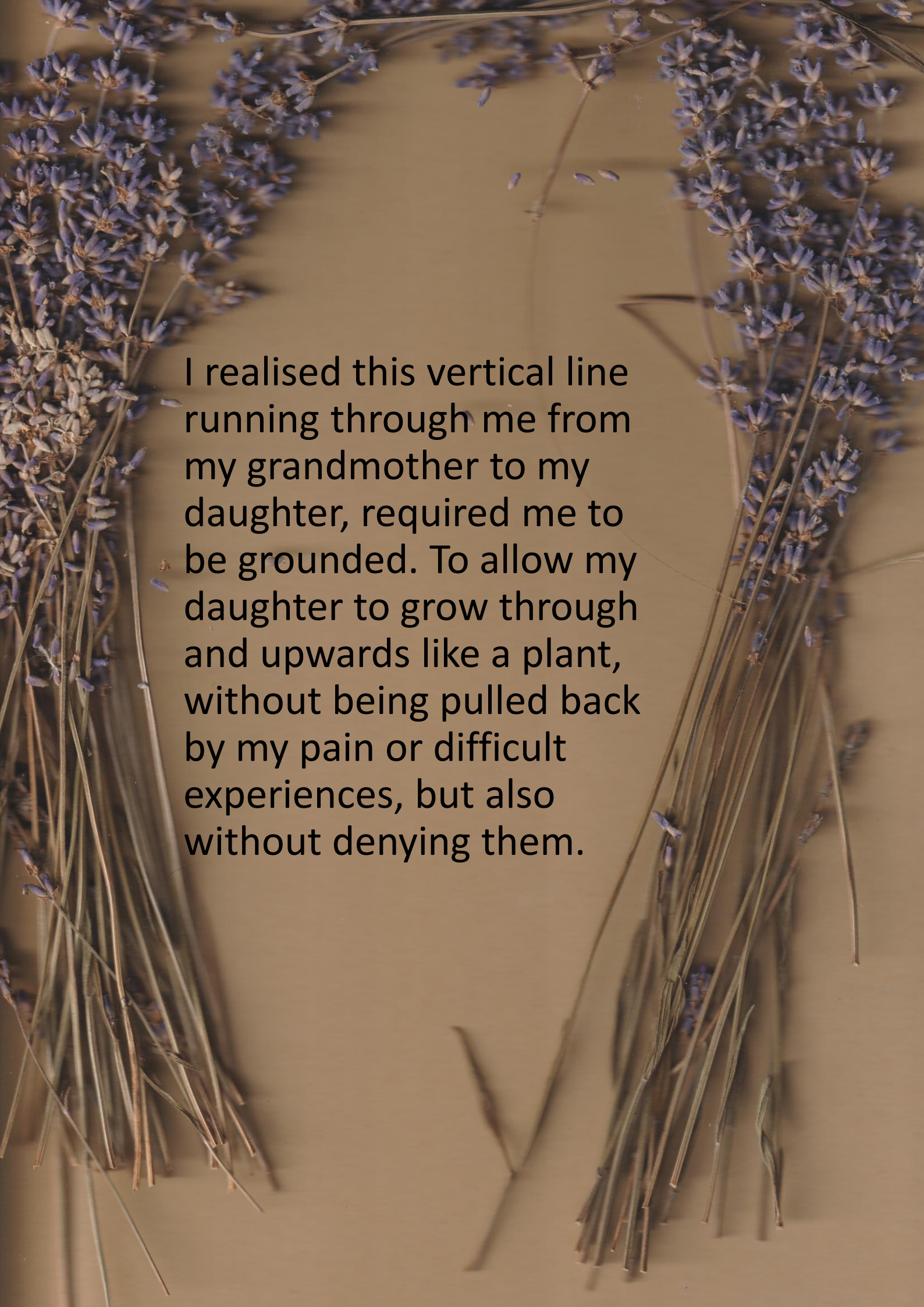
As I grew, I explored the source of this feeling of being tangled when trying to fly. In my mid 30s, I lost my mum, after a long journey with dementia. She was unable to speak verbally at this point. As I redefined my relationship with her in her last years of life, I experienced several revelations. I became aware that my mother had shared with me unspoken experiences that had been affecting me all my life. I now realised, these did not belong to me, but her. In this connection, I gained knowledge of things never verbally disclosed. In those last week's, this inaudible communication had never been more honest.



I understood that I had lived inside her cells, and she had lived inside the cells of her mother. Each cell remembering her experiences were also responsible for bringing me into existence. I had a deep knowing of her. An invisible line connected me through her to my grandmother, and generations beyond. A thread that at times remembered experiences that felt pain, twitched and pulled me backwards.

The image features two bundles of dried lavender flowers, one on the left and one on the right, framing a central area. The flowers are small, purple, and densely packed on thin, light-colored stems. The background is a soft, light beige or cream color, providing a gentle contrast to the purple of the lavender. The overall composition is simple and evocative, with the lavender symbolizing calmness and tranquility.

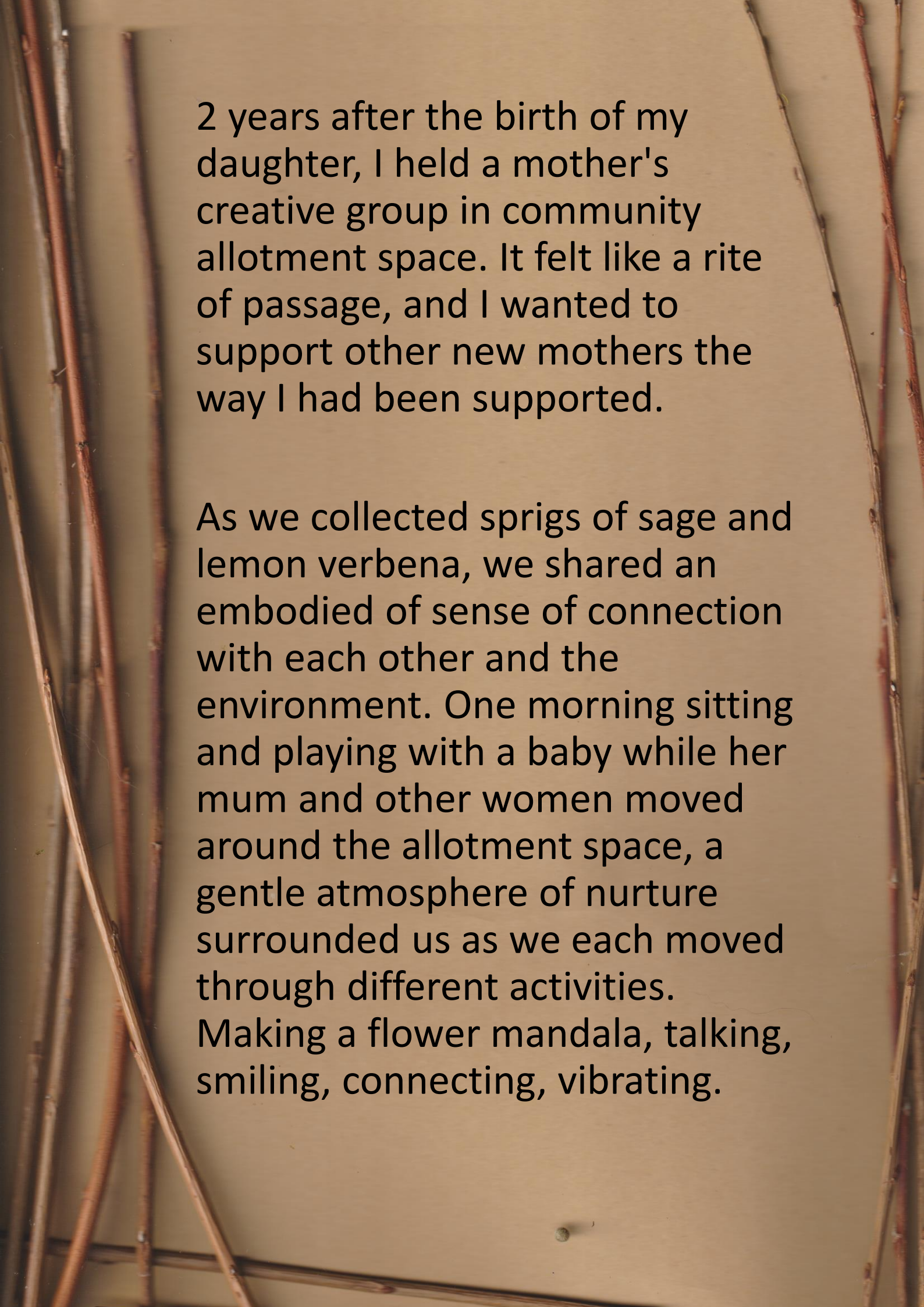
When I became a mother, it was a time of so much mixed joy and sadness. The loss of my mother 3 years earlier ricocheted back to me. I also experienced a transformation, stabilising me to provide steadiness for my daughter.

The image features two bundles of dried lavender flowers, one on the left and one on the right, set against a light brown, textured background. The lavender stems are thin and woody, with small, dried blue-purple flowers clustered along them. The overall composition is simple and evocative, with the text centered between the two bundles of flowers.

I realised this vertical line running through me from my grandmother to my daughter, required me to be grounded. To allow my daughter to grow through and upwards like a plant, without being pulled back by my pain or difficult experiences, but also without denying them.

I knew I could not do this alone. I navigated toward a community of mothers who shared and accepted each other and where I could reciprocate this acceptance. Supporting each other through the transition into motherhood.

I became aware that in order to honour this vertical lineage, I would need the horizontal thread that ran through me when in a circle of women. This line can't be seen. I can feel it, it's like a vibration.



2 years after the birth of my daughter, I held a mother's creative group in community allotment space. It felt like a rite of passage, and I wanted to support other new mothers the way I had been supported.

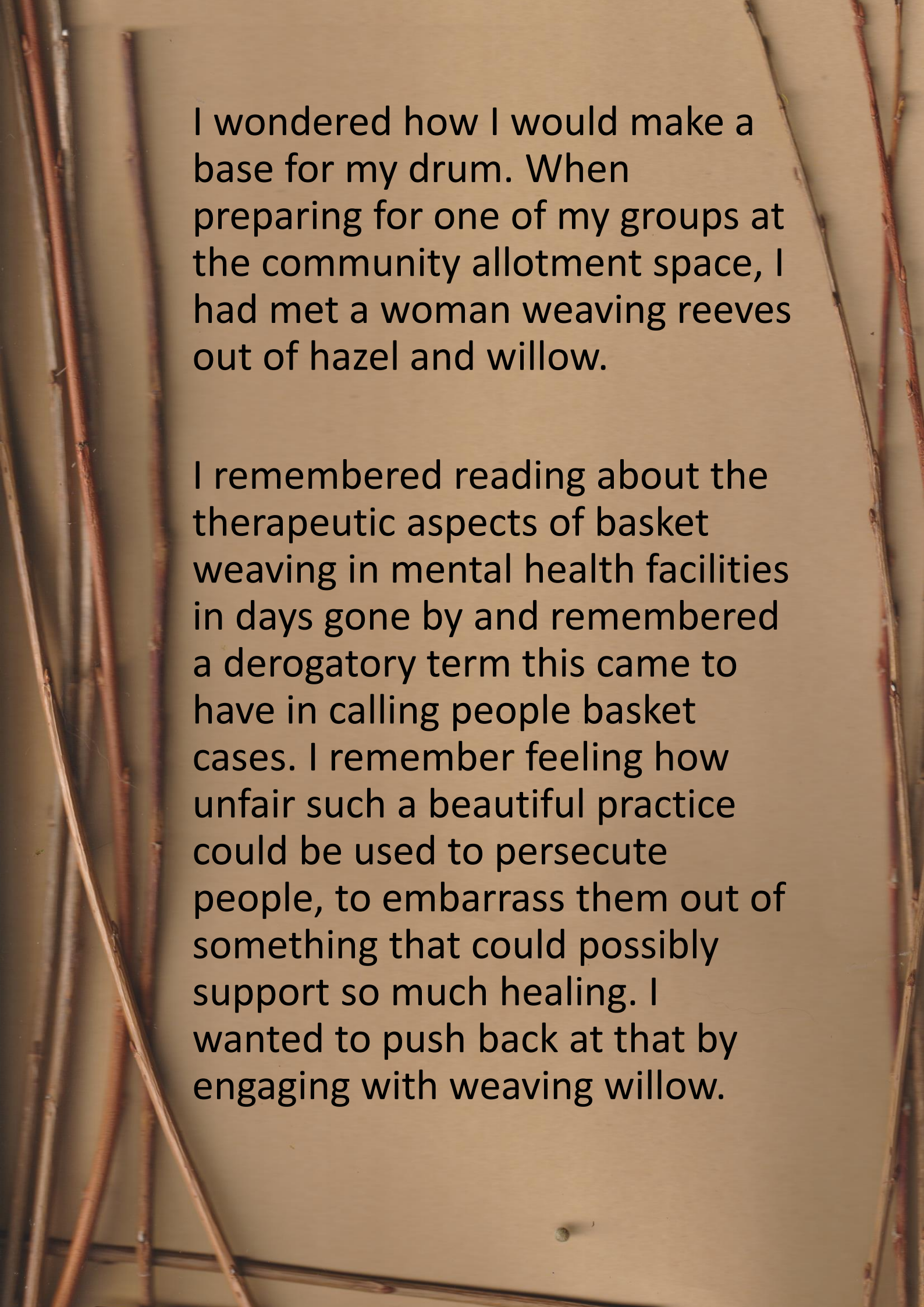
As we collected sprigs of sage and lemon verbena, we shared an embodied sense of connection with each other and the environment. One morning sitting and playing with a baby while her mum and other women moved around the allotment space, a gentle atmosphere of nurture surrounded us as we each moved through different activities. Making a flower mandala, talking, smiling, connecting, vibrating.

I wondered how to manifest this idea of vibration. I attended a tantric workshop, where a drum was beat by a gifted healer. It was explained that the vibration, could mirror the beating our hearts, calming the nervous system.

I recall the meditation from that day, which I replicated in one of my groups; to feel into our hearts and take a memory of joy, allowing this to light up our whole being. We'd feel into parts of ourselves that felt less loved, less lovable, and wrap that joy, compassion and love around it. These experiences felt connected. I decided to make a drum.

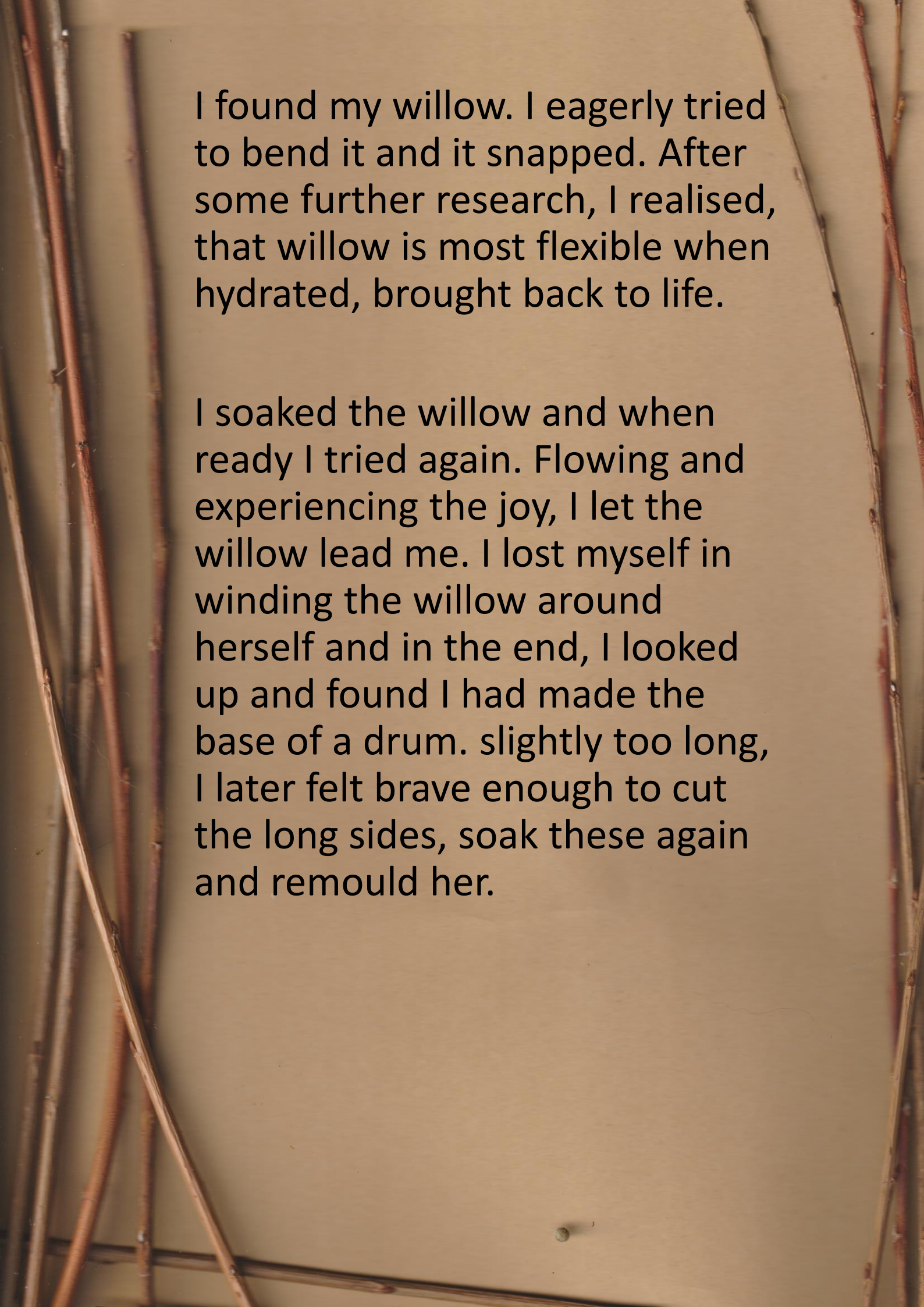
I remembered a fermentation course I attended years earlier. One of the ferments we learned about was kombucha; a fermented tea, which would form a skin on the top, which in some cases has been used to make leather.

However, more than this, what I remembered, was that a kombucha skin, is also known as a mother. A kombucha mother, is not one being, but a community of probiotic microorganisms that support each other, and can be taken as a medicine as well as being an abundant supply which can multiply to create further mothers. The skin is tough but flexible. I brewed a batch in a large tub, and I nurtured her for 2 months. She became the skin of my drum. This mighty mother Kombucha.



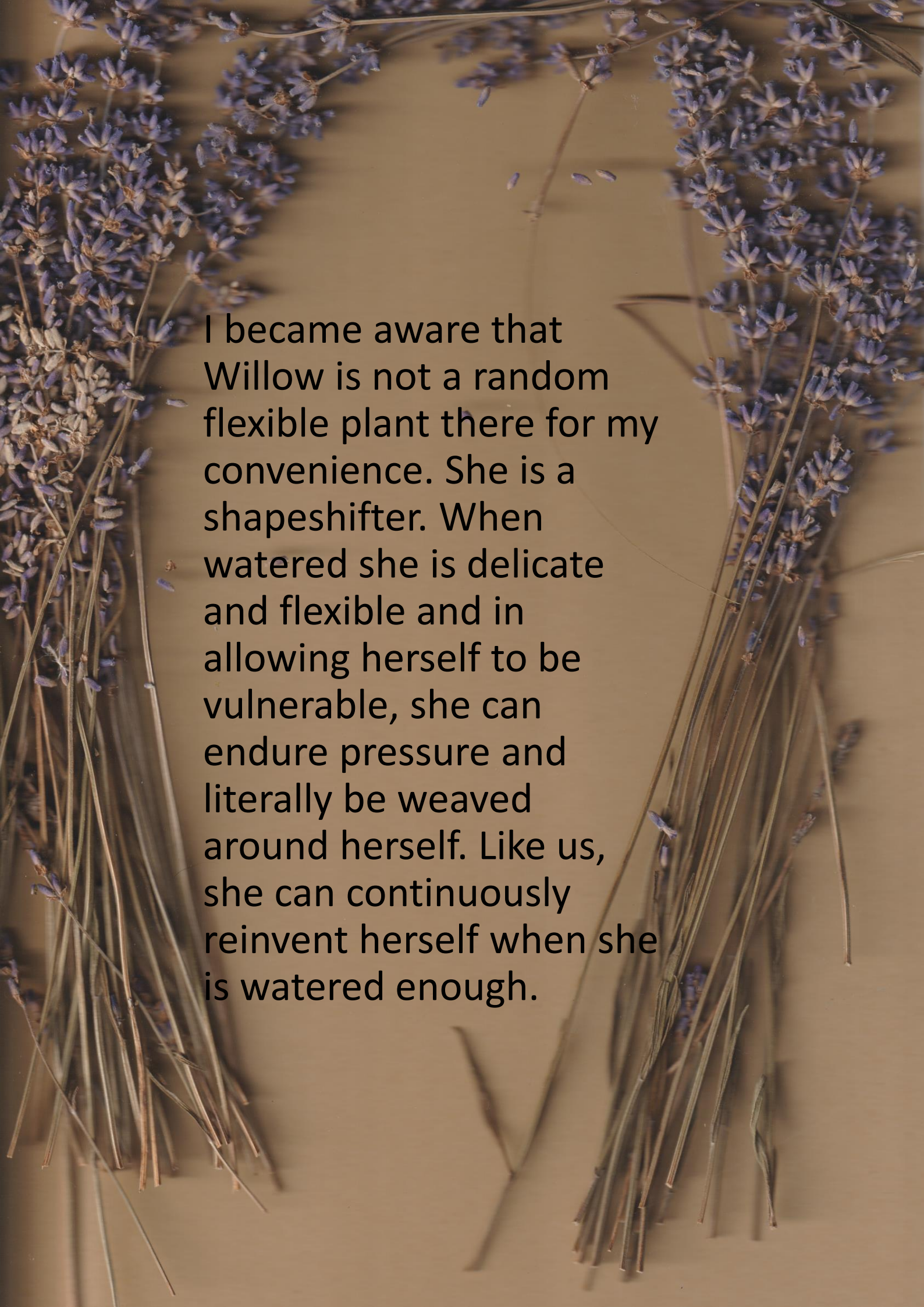
I wondered how I would make a base for my drum. When preparing for one of my groups at the community allotment space, I had met a woman weaving reeves out of hazel and willow.

I remembered reading about the therapeutic aspects of basket weaving in mental health facilities in days gone by and remembered a derogatory term this came to have in calling people basket cases. I remember feeling how unfair such a beautiful practice could be used to persecute people, to embarrass them out of something that could possibly support so much healing. I wanted to push back at that by engaging with weaving willow.



I found my willow. I eagerly tried to bend it and it snapped. After some further research, I realised, that willow is most flexible when hydrated, brought back to life.

I soaked the willow and when ready I tried again. Flowing and experiencing the joy, I let the willow lead me. I lost myself in winding the willow around herself and in the end, I looked up and found I had made the base of a drum. slightly too long, I later felt brave enough to cut the long sides, soak these again and remould her.

The image features two bundles of dried lavender flowers, one on the left and one on the right, set against a light brown, textured background. The lavender is a deep purple color, and the stems are thin and light brown. The text is centered in the middle of the image, written in a black, sans-serif font.

I became aware that Willow is not a random flexible plant there for my convenience. She is a shapeshifter. When watered she is delicate and flexible and in allowing herself to be vulnerable, she can endure pressure and literally be weaved around herself. Like us, she can continuously reinvent herself when she is watered enough.

I wrapped and sewed fabric around the willow base and sprayed this with linseed oil. I became anxious that the drum would not sound percussive. I became distracted by outcomes; despite the experience I had had when weaving the willow and nurturing the Kombucha. I described the drum saying that it 'didn't work'.

Then I realigned myself, it didn't have to. It didn't have to be what I intended. It was a journey. A learning of materials that that revealed stories for me.

- I still needed to bind the kombucha skin to the drum. I picked up my trusty jute string and began to bind. I again became lost in the process. I looked down and I had wrapped the drum in jute string completely. Wrapping the drum in gentle protection, she became something more, a binding a spell, honouring the weaving of lives, stories, love and compassion that was held in the groups of women that I had been part of. A manifestation of the invisible vibrational lines that protect us when in a community.

The journey supported me to unravel experiences and how they connected to my threads and lineage. Kombucha mother, willow, natural string, together supported me to manifest a physical totem to the experience I've had when in community. A collective moving as one, strength in flexibility and playfulness, and protection in the binding of our spirits when in a trusting space. Since having my daughter and being surrounded by community, I no longer get tangled in the wires. I certainly feel confused and lost sometimes, but only in my head. My soul feels very found.

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Listen to the audio version
here



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