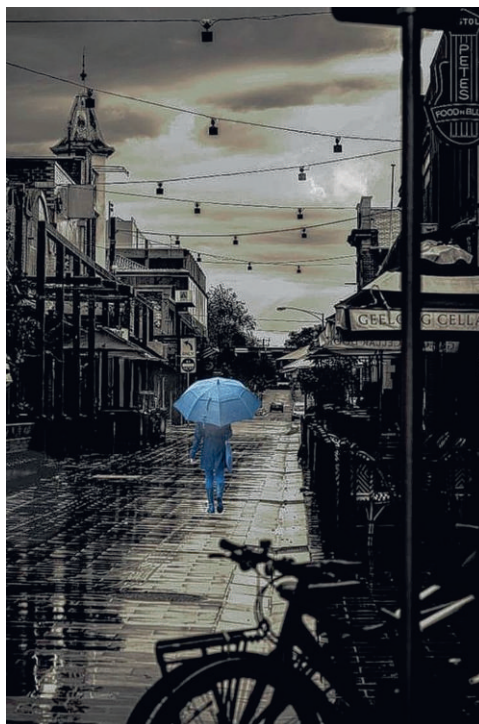
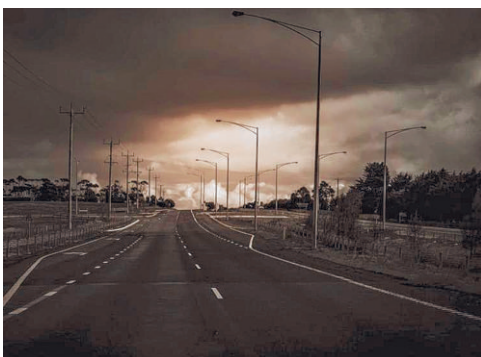
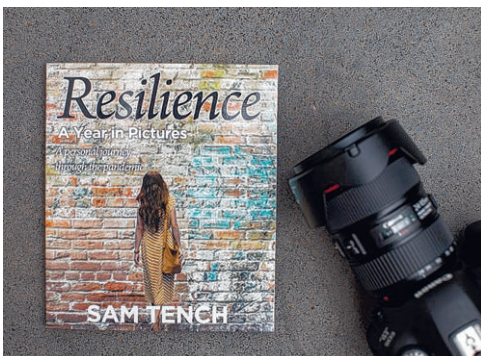


# HEALING THROUGH PICTURES

THREE YEARS AGO SAM TENCH COULDN'T EVEN LEAVE THE HOUSE HER ANXIETY WAS SO CRIPPLING. BUT DISCOVERING A LOVE OF PHOTOGRAPHY HAS HELPED HER SEE THE WORLD IN A NEW LIGHT, WRITES SARAH BIESKE



Sam Tench got behind the camera after struggling with mental health issues and has published a book featuring her work. Photos: Ginger + Mint (top and middle) and Sam Tench

SAM Tench had never known the pure joy of being completely immersed in a passion until she held a camera in her hands.

It was a Mother's Day gift from her husband Giang and daughters Hannah and Georgie and it changed her life in a way she could never have imagined.

"I was seeing the world for the first time," Sam says. "Until I started looking through the lens, I don't think I had ever really taken anything in."

From the outside, Sam's life looks white-picket-fence perfect. She lives in a leafy pocket of Newtown, is happily married and the mum of two adoring little girls.

But the torment she has faced since she was a child only heightened in her adult years.

Three years ago she was too anxious to leave the house, fearful of what people would think about her. Sam felt secure behind her own front door, but she was anything but happy.

"At its peak, I'd find any possible excuse not to have to attend social occasions," Sam explains.

"I didn't want to be around people due to fear of being seen, judged, and not feeling good enough. Some days I struggled to leave my wardrobe because my clothes were taunting me. I felt inferior to everyone else."

Sam was born in England but moved to Australia with her family when she was four, settling in Winchelsea.

She can't remember a time she wasn't riddled with anxiety and was extremely shy throughout her school years. Privately, she also battled a crippling eating disorder, something she was never able to shake.

"My issues stem back to my childhood, I don't blame anybody now but it was all about body image," Sam explains.

She forced herself to get on with life, moving to Geelong when she finished school and later becoming a kindergarten teacher.

After marrying and settling into life as a mum, she desperately wanted to feel happiness – knowing that on paper she "had it all" made it harder to grapple with the fact she wasn't.

"I had attended some programs interstate before and had spent a good couple of months away from my family to try and get better, but nothing ever changed and I would come home feeling disappointed I still felt the same," Sam says.

It all came to a head one day in 2019, with a visit from a friend prompting Sam to admit herself into The Geelong Clinic, a medically-endorsed inpatient program focusing on eating disorders.

"The cycle of self-destruction for me only got worse and I still remember the day, falling to the

floor in my home, telling my mum I wanted to die because life was too hard," Sam says.

"I couldn't do it any more and I didn't want to. Everything was complicated and too hard. Nothing made sense. My friend came to help and that was when we all knew something had to change."

Sam says it took all of her strength and determination to not just complete the program, but finally feel a difference.

It wasn't long after she returned home that she was given the camera. Her natural reaction was to feel overwhelmed, but there was something about it that made her want to know more. Now she can't imagine life without it.

"When I unwrapped the camera, I remember thinking, 'Why would you buy me a camera? This is

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too much'," Sam says.

"I was in shock and scared of this piece of equipment that I had no idea how to use. The buttons, the instructions, the settings – I went straight to that place of feeling like it was all too hard for me. It was nothing like love at first sight.

"But after a few weeks of playing around and getting even more discouraged, I found a photographer in Geelong who offered one-on-one lessons ... and slowly but surely I learned. I remember the first time I shot a photo of a flying bird and the excitement I felt because I'd managed to freeze the bird mid-air with no blur. It was incredible.

"Something inside me clicked ... all of a sudden I had this interest in the world around me. For the first time in my life, different thoughts were circulating in my mind. It wasn't about my body, clothes, size, or food. My mind was too busy with this camera and discovering what I could do with it."

Before long, Sam couldn't leave the house without throwing her camera over her shoulder, spending hours – sometimes days – capturing the world as she saw it, slowly healing with each picture she took.

Realising how much better she felt, she started a