

June 14, 2022

I came to expect that my happiness would be sabotaged.<sup>1</sup> My life isn't all misery – far from it. But lately<sup>2</sup> I find myself feeling great sadness for the loss of my eldest son, and more for the loss of the childhood years of my two youngest sons. That robbed me of an intimacy with them that can never be rebuilt.

I relinquished custody of them to their father, trusting that we had a friendship that would mean I would not lose connection with them. My eldest son had gone to live with his father at the age of 15, something that made me very sad but he seemed to want to give it a go so I didn't try to stop him. My then husband – later the father of my two youngest sons - positively encouraged it.

I moved to Newstead in 1989 following the break-up of my marriage, and to take advantage of a government housing loan scheme. I couldn't afford a house in the inner city, I don't like the suburbs, and I had done some touring in country Victoria<sup>3</sup> and was attracted to it. I rented a house in Castlemaine with my four children, waiting for go-ahead from the government to choose a house.

It was tough. I had no real friends in the area. I had left the support of family and friends in Melbourne, in particular, my mother. With my husband, George, I had been an active part of the Melbourne folk scene, including being part of the committee which organized the 1986 National Folk Festival at LaTrobe Uni. I was also instrumental in convening a national meeting of movers and shakers in the folk scene. This was held in Melbourne, and resulted in a submission to government to fund state folk music co-ordinators.

My social life and support group revolved around the folk scene for a number of years. We gathered for parties that involved playing music together. As people paired up and babies were born, we gathered often for a meal at one house or another, where there would usually be singing involved. We looked after each other's babies to give the new parents a chance to go out for dinner, even breastfeeding each other's babies. We joked about how we would all be in an old people's home together, still singing.

After I left George, I lost all of that. Our house went on the market and I moved into a rental in Castlemaine. Only one person from my folkie friends contacted or came to visit after I moved to Castlemaine.

While I was living in Castlemaine, I became involved in helping to organize the Maldon Folk Festival, which was run by Fatty Wilson at that time. I also met Ken, who was helping also. Ken rode a motorbike, which rekindled my passion for riding. I think that was the main chemical between us. Getting into a relationship with him was one of the stupidest things I've ever done.

Six months after moving to Castlemaine, I bought a house in Newstead, and my father came to live with us. Fatty was great in mobilizing a team to get me moved out of the rental in Castlemaine and into the house at Newstead, a feat accomplished in about 4 hours.

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<sup>1</sup> I think this began when we migrated from the US to Australia. I was just short of thirteen, in grade 7. My best friend was Betsy Bean. She was a year younger than me, and a year behind in school, but from the time she moved into our neighbourhood when I was eight, we were besties. We wrote to each other for a while during the first couple of years, and I even sent her a shell bracelet from Fiji. I found it hard to make friends in Australia, and never really had another best friend that I could confide in.

<sup>2</sup> This was first written in June, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> With my bush band, Woodside.

About a month later, I sent out invitations to an At Home weekend to my friends in Melbourne. It wasn't a party as such, and perhaps I didn't word it too well, but the only people who turned up were my mother and John Beavis. I could only surmise that most of the social group of which George and I had been a part had 'sided' with George.

About 3 or 4 months after I moved in, I had a visit from the Department of Social Security, who had information that I was in a relationship, and my partner was living with me. The truth was, Ken had a bungalow in Castlemaine, but he was at that time at my house because he had dropped his bike and skinned his knees pretty much to the bone, so I was nursing him. The social security officer accepted the story, and no further action was to be taken.

The incident shattered me in many ways. I didn't know who had informed on me, and could only assume it was someone I knew. I lost faith in other people, and in myself.

Not long after that, I bought my own motorbike. Up to that time, I had never asked Russell for any maintenance money for Bonny, so I asked him for a lump sum, which he readily gave me.

I loved it.

I was out riding with Ken after he finished work, then we would go to the pub for a while. I would be back and forth a bit getting dinner ready, and often one or more of the kids would come to the pub for a bit.

I was struggling financially. I hadn't thought about job prospects for me in the country. I was a qualified teacher – in English as a Second Language! I had moved into one of the most Anglo regions in the state!

I wanted to play. I was enjoying the bike riding and the pub. I was counting on Dad and Jay more and more for help with the younger kids, and even with some meals. I was starting to feel incompetent.

I'm the eldest of seven children. From quite a young age, I was given some responsibility for their care. When I was 13, and we had only been in Australia less than 6 months, my parents left me in charge of the house and the kids while they went to Sydney for a long weekend. At the time, I thought it was quite normal. I often had babysitting duties, and when I was fifteen, it was often up to me to do the weekly shopping.

I had a couple of years between school and having my first child, at the age of 20.

In 1990, I had had a preschooler at home for all but 1 of the past 18 years. In that time, I had done 6 years tertiary education, worked part-time for most of it, including dressmaking from home, and had some full-time work.

I was desperate for some play time, some time away from responsibilities. And sleep. I needed more sleep! I approached St Luke's, a local charity that helped families. I was let down by my own articulateness and ability to keep myself together. Inside, I wanted to scream out for time off. Just time off. Four weeks! But when I was assessed by their team, they decided I wasn't needy enough.

If only I could have wept to show my need. I wanted to scream at them – but I don't do that.

I asked family and friends for help, but the only help I could get was that my mother would take Jay, and Bonny could be fostered out with a family of a friend from the primary school she had attended in Coburg. And the only place the boys could go was to George. I trusted him, and promised I would not fight him for custody again, as I did not want them being footballs.

From the day he took custody of them, he never spoke a word to me about the boys, about their schooling, their health – nothing. If I phoned, he put me straight on to Tim. On Tim's birthday – his fifth or sixth – I popped Bonny on the back of the motorbike, and we left Newstead at about 6 am so we could reach him and give him a birthday present before he went to school. I knocked on the door, gave him his present, then George came to the door, ordered Tim back inside, and told me never to come to his house again.

There is much more I could say on this, but that will do for now.

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On September 1 last year, I was on the phone to a friend, Jules, because she hadn't given me all the material for her application for the festival. She was intending to perform at Newstead Live with her partner, Greg, and another musician. Jules and Greg are partners, and good friends of Russell's, my ex-partner with whom I share a house. On the evening of his birthday, we had a Zoom session with Jules and Greg, with long-distance toasts with glasses of wine.

After the meeting, they had gotten into an argument and Greg had physically assaulted her. She spent the night in ER, and had black eyes and severe bruising. She was not in a good state of mind. I spoke with her for over half an hour, trying to calm her. I had been through a serious DV incident involving physical and sexual assault 45 years before.

When I got off the phone to Jules, I was a bit shaken. I briefly mentioned to Russell that Greg had assaulted Jules but he pretty much dismissed it, saying there had to be more to the story. I didn't pursue it with him, just said I thought he ought to know. I went back to my room, and felt my body go into shock. I was shaking inside, I was cold. Memories of my own assault were playing out in my mind.

I told this to a long-time friend, and she immediately recognized it as PTSD.

It made sense.

Over time, I thought about the things that make me want to cry – and sometimes, I do cry. Other things come to me as having shaped my response to and expectations of the world, of life.

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When I was 8, my mother was pregnant with her sixth child. The time came when the rest of the children were sent away so Mum could have the baby and not worry about us. It would be a home birth. I went to my paternal grandparents. Came the day when they took me back home. Up the stairs we went. I stood in the doorway while my grandparents spoke with Mum and Dad. As they talked, and I looked around the room, I realized there was no baby. I came to realise that it had been born dead.

I was devastated but kept it to myself. No one was paying any attention to me.

I went to my own bedroom and looked under my pillow, where I had left a tooth for the Tooth Fairy. The tooth was still there.

I went back to my parents' bedroom and stood in the doorway. My father noticed me then, and noticed the tears which had started.

"What's wrong," he said, sitting down and pulling me onto his knee.

"The Tooth Fairy didn't come," I answered. I didn't know how to express the acute disappointment and grief I was feeling.

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*May 4, 2025*

Of all the things that I cry over, it's sadness over the loss of custody of Time and Davy that I find the hardest to control.

After they'd been with George about 3 months, we were in the car. The boys were in the back in their car seats, and Ken was driving. All of a sudden, Tim said to me, "Mum, can you go to [the court] and tell the man with the hammer that we want to live with you?"

It still makes me tear up.

I tried to explain that it wasn't that easy, that I would have to engage a lawyer and I didn't have enough money. And I didn't. I was then living on unemployment benefits, and I hadn't been able to find a job. I also recalled my undertaking not to make footballs of the boys. But I was heartbroken to not have custody of them.

Sometime later in 1990, Bonny came back to live with me. Here's what happened.

Keryn Archer had a party one weekend in Maryborough. Mum and JB came up to go to the party and they brought Bonny up for weekend. For some reason, Chris was also there. At the party were Jamie Johnson and his daughter Lyndal, who was a few months younger than Bonny. Lis Johnson had died of cancer the year before. Bonny and Lyndal were hanging out together, and after a while, Bonny approached Jamie and asked him if it was true that Lis had died. Jamie gently explained that it was true. Bonny was very thoughtful but didn't say any more at that point.

Mum, JB, Chris and Bonny stayed the night at my place. The next day, they were packing the car to go back to Melbourne, and when the time came for Bonny to get in the car. She didn't want to go, so Chris picked her up to carry her into the car. Bonny panicked and started screaming in protest that she didn't want to go. Somehow from her screams, I knew she was afraid that if she let me out of her sight, she might never see me again, like Lyndal would never see her mother again. With some protests from Chris, I took Bonny out of the car and said she could stay.

I had started casual work at SkillShare a little while before, so I was financially in an okay position, although not great.

I had the boys with me every second weekend. When the boys had been in my custody and George had fortnightly access, I would often drive the boys to Melbourne to deliver them to him, then we would meet halfway for the return trip. However, George made no such concession for me, and if I wanted the boys with me for the weekend, I either had to make the two round trips myself, or try to get some help, usually from my mother.

I continued to work at SkillShare on a casual basis, teaching computer literacy. Things went along well enough, although casual wages were barely adequate, and I continued getting some government benefits from time to time. I loved the job, and I loved my colleagues there. However, the manager left early in 1994 and things started to change. I stayed on for a while but I really wanted an ongoing position, and I wanted to get the boys back if I could. Bonny was now at high school at Highview College in Maryborough.

I started looking through positions vacant every weekend, and decided I would rent the house out and move to Melbourne to find work. I went to Myers in Bendigo and bought a corporate looking skirt suit. I also bought a small amount of make-up. It wasn't long before I had a job interview with a bank in Collins Street as computer support person. PCs were just rolling out across workplaces at that time. I didn't get that job, but I did get casual work in the ESL department at what was then Western Metropolitan Institute of Technology. I rented a house around the corner from Mum and JB in Coburg, and, after considerable negotiation with the principal, Bonny was enrolled in Princes Hill High School. We were about four streets away from where George and the boys were living.

I was still mostly only seeing the boys every other weekend, but sometimes, they started riding their bikes over just for a short visit. Things started to feel a bit more normal, and we were getting close again.

I had known George was saying unkind things about me to the boys because sometimes they would repeat it when they were fooling around in the back yard. However, I didn't realise the extent of the emotional control/blackmail until one day when the boys were at my house and something came up that sent Davy into near hysteria, something about his Dad wouldn't love him anymore if he spent too much time with me. He ran away from me, hopped on his little bike, and tore off towards George's. I sent Timmy after him, afraid he would come to some harm crossing roads.

I was deeply upset. I went around to my mother's and told her what had happened. She was furious! She marched off to George's, me following in her wake. She banged on his door and as soon as he opened it, she told him just what she thought of his behaviour. He just stood staring at her. She turned and left, he closed the door.

It didn't change anything.

In late 1996, I started a new relationship with Paul. He was a freelance computer programmer, and he earned good money. George applied to the court for maintenance. Paul was not supporting me, and I was still only on casual wages. The court ruled that I was not in a position to make maintenance payments. Shortly after that, I applied to the Family Court to regain custody of the boys. We were directed to counselling. I agreed, as I still didn't have money for a lawyer. The counselling was conducted in a private room with me, George and the boys all present at the same time. There was no way the boys were going to indicate that they wanted to come and live with me. George agreed to more access time if and when the boys wanted it. I knew he would not keep his word, and he didn't. I don't think he actually said they couldn't visit when they wanted, he just had them in his control.

I couldn't sustain living so close to them and not having freer access. In addition, Paul had a pushbike accident and broke his pelvis. I agreed to look after him, and we soon moved back to my house in Newstead.

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*May 9, 2025*

At some point, I have to put this out there. I think today will be the day.

Before I do, there's one aspect I haven't mentioned. Pain. I have never let pain rule my life but it has often been there. The last three or four years, it has impacted greatly on my life. I can't drive for more than about half an hour most of the time. Occasionally, I can push it to about an hour to get to Lancefield to meet Jay, but even that hasn't happened lately. The upshot is that I feel really

disconnected from Jay and her kids and grandchildren. It was awful when I couldn't make it to Paige's wedding.

I feel irrelevant to them.

This is going to sound like some sort of indulgent self-pity, but here goes.

I stopped celebrating birthdays and Christmas because firstly, my finances were not great. Secondly, I felt that whatever I bought was inadequate. When I sold the house in Lyons Street, I briefly felt that I had some money to spend and made the effort to buy a heap of Christmas presents, managed to send flowers for a few birthdays, and tried to make an effort to send cards or make phone calls. Then the new house building costs exploded and I was worse off than I had been. I'm sorry to say that I gave up. I think I shot myself in the foot, but it wouldn't be the first time.

The pain is now constant, possibly emanating from problems with my spine, which might be remediated with an operation if my name ever comes up on the public waiting list. Sometimes at night, I have to get out of bed and move around. I feel like I'm climbing the walls, and often I end up in tears. Moderate painkillers don't help, and stronger painkillers bring other problems I'd rather not have to deal with.

Apart from all that, for the last two or three months, I find myself unable to focus on tasks. I dither, I end up playing solitaire for long spells, or doing crosswords. I have plenty I could be doing but I don't. I have totally neglected my web site, despite having plans for recording more songs, a swag of stories I've already written, and a list of ideas on more stories I'd still like to write. And I don't walk much anymore.

I need to get back on track and I'm not sure how I'm going to do that.

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So that's the story so far. Any comments or suggestions appreciated but remember that I've been around a while, and I'm not stupid.

Love you all.

