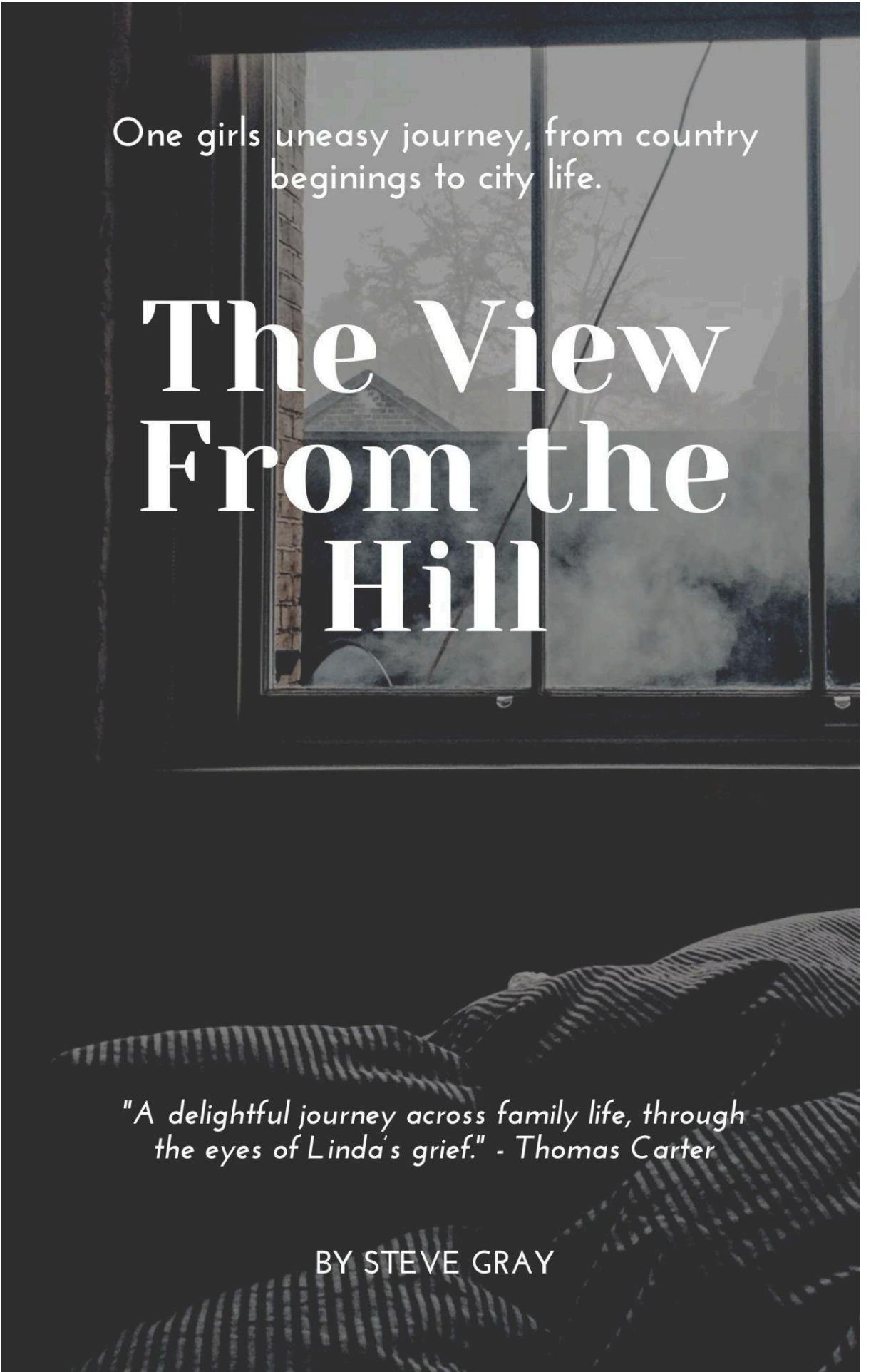




One girl's uneasy journey, from country
beginnings to city life.

The View From the Hill

*"A delightful journey across family life, through
the eyes of Linda's grief." - Thomas Carter*

BY STEVE GRAY

The View From the Hill.



Exploring the past and recalling memories gave Linda hope and solace. Follow her stories as she unravels her sometimes fascinating past. In the process, she gets to let go and come to terms with some aspects of her eccentric life.

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Chapter One

'I wonder if the place where you grew up might be something to explore?' Gail Said

'Okay, should I be detailed or not?'

'That's entirely up to you, whatever you feel comfortable with.'

Oh, okay, well, our town was kind of small and therefore a bit unremarkable, I never really hated it or anything, it was okay I guess, perhaps I just had nothing much to compare it with, I grew up there and it was alright. Some kids at school hated it, but that was probably because they moved here from other places, so they had other experiences to compare to I guess. It was nice enough and depending on what you wanted it could be okay, for me it was okay.

Across the main street and down a bit from our house was a park, it was mostly green except in the middle of those really hot summers, there was parking, a playground and a grassy area that led up to a hill, not quite big enough to be a look out, but you could walk up there and see over most of the town. Those who didn't really like the place, I figured they had probably never been to the top of the hill, I have on a number of occasions and I liked the view.

When I got a bit older the playground area there was okay, you could sit on the swing for ages and go back and forth. Over time I explored the hill a bit more, and then figured out that I could ride my bike up there, right up to the top by zig zagging back and forth so the angle wasn't so steep.

Coming down was tricky and more than a few times I came off, the bike would slide if the grass was a bit wet or too long. You would get a grass stain on your clothes but that was about it. No injuries, perhaps a bruise or two.

Being up on top of the hill some days was better than others, passers through might be stopped at the playground and you could watch their kids playing and messing about in the playground, squeals of delight, and if you were there long enough you could see them leave and the park would become quiet again.

There were a couple of big old trees there. The shade was nice, they were too high to climb, but the shade and the filtered light was so nice. Many people parked there on their way through, they would open the boot on their car and have a picnic on the park bench there. I think most people who stopped there would have said 'Oh look at the trees there, let's stop.' or on the way through on another trip, 'Hey let's stop at that park, you know the one with the big trees?' Then near to that were some other trees planted a long time ago I guess, but not as long ago as the big trees. You could climb those ones.

There are only a few roads that make up the town using a simple grid pattern. One of the things that made it a viable place to be was the amount of surrounding farms. People who went to the primary school came in by bus or car, some on bikes. Same for those wanting a quick shop without having to go to the next town which was bigger for more major shopping, supermarkets and so on, it was a 'viable' place to stop and get the basics at the general store.

The store had pies and some cakes, that was the extent of their hot takeaway foods, oh and sandwiches. On the weekend there could be quite a bit of activity at the shop, people getting those sorts of things. I got some part time work there over the holidays a couple of times. There were always at least three of us, one on the till, the others cleaning, sorting, arranging, talking, messing about, eating things that had fallen out of boxes, making sandwiches... and so on. Old Charlie would walk through, trying to have a day off, yeah well that rarely worked. He had his nose in everything in the shop.

He was always kind to me, some of the others he would yell at if they got something wrong, he had a hot head at times. He showed me the details of what he expected me to do. Some afternoons on a Sunday I would be up the front in the window of the store, sorting things on a shelf and stop, look out up the street and see people in the park, having a fun time. It could be really distracting.

I would sometimes get right into the organising, and there was one spot where you could just stop and let things go by. One day I was there for about twenty minutes, standing, doing nothing, watching out the window. No one noticed or cared I guess, they were doing their own things serving and whatever, it was a sunny but cloudy day outside, people up at the park came and went. I stood with a can of baked beans in my hand. I remember that.

In my head things were ticking over, I went from being amused by the view, the people in the park to my own thoughts of what I would be doing in years to come, how school was or wasn't going and mum and dad and other things. I watched people pull up in their cars and come in, then go out. There were people out for a day trip, and their kids in the car, dropped in for whatever they wanted.

I watched one girl, probably my age or a bit older. She sat there looking half interested I liked the way she did her hair, the way she sat, leaned up against the window, it might have been hot or something, 'cause she wound down the window, she flipped her long hair over her shoulder, I could see more of her face, she just looked kind of refined, a happy look, not bothered about things too much. Then off she drove.

I would often check out people, especially in class and later on, who wore what, how they looked, did they care about how they looked, should I care about how I looked? Or should I say, should I care more about how I look? Not that I didn't care about how I looked, I could scrub up okay, not into fashion that much and not into anything alternative, I guess you could say I was practical, if you're going to climb a tree then you wouldn't wear a dress or anything like that.

Yep looking out the window you could watch all sorts of things, and wonder about them, I reckon there's something about being separated from something that leaves you wondering about things, there is some silence no noise between where you are and they are, like the noise of a car taking off you would hear it but not loud or clear, that sort of thing. It's a quiet moment of isolation where your mind can wander and you have the chance to just be, to just sit and let your mind wander.

In the shop I would just ease back into the job, sort a bit more, bring things to the front of the shelf and get more things out to put on the shelf, wipe things down, serve the occasional customer. Listen to the others have a giggle about something. They often giggled about an old guy on his bike.

His bike was the rustiest thing ever, he would slowly lollop along the road and put the bike up against the verandah post, pull up his pants and waddle in, he wasn't big or anything, it was that sort of waddle you have when you get off riding a horse, it takes a while for your legs to get back into position.

It turns out he had lost his licence for drink driving home from the pub, so his ute had to stay home and he rode the old bike. He lived down a dead end street, they never extended the street because there was never enough money to put in a bridge, the end of the street was a creek. Dad said the bridge would have been a bridge to nowhere and the farm on the other side had a road to it off another road anyway.

This guy's farm was sort of a dumping place and he was called dumpy because of that. He would buy up all sorts of stuff and say things like 'The price of scrap metal will go up one day and I will make money off that, or some old car he'd say, 'I'm gunna do that up, one day, when I find time.' but he never did, well not that I know of. Graeme, Graeme Hill, but everyone called him Dumpy or Mr Hill to us in the shop. Except for Charlie he called him Graeme.

He drove his ute in the yard at the back of the house to keep it running. He said he didn't want the thing to stop working just cause he wasn't allowed to drive it and so on. His brother would come over and take it for a bit more of a drive and fill it with petrol. I figure old Dumpy didn't have a lot of money either, judging by the state of his pants.

He would arrive at the shop at about the same time on Sundays, waddle in and get some bits and pieces. He had an old canvas backpack the sort that old hikers would have, dad said they were called haversacks, worn to blazes it was. In would go his milk, bread and whatever and off he would go. Doddery as all get out old Dumpy, he would take off in a jittery way with a bit of a wobble until he got up to speed. Then off down the side street.

Years later he got meals on wheels from the council, mum heard he wasn't too thrilled about it at first, and hadn't had many visitors in years. Now he would have people show up every couple of days and knock on his door.

He rode that bike until he couldn't. He fell over in the main street one afternoon, and damaged his leg. Charlie was out there like a rocket and called the Ambulance. Dumpy didn't like the fuss but had no choice, then the meals on wheels started when he got home. His brother would drop in more often after that.

I can still see him tottering off down that road to his place, it was the only house off that road, the other use for the road I guess was for the farmer who had to have access to his paddocks on the other side of the road. Funny though I don't remember there being any gates there though?

Dumpy didn't seem to use his land for anything, not sure how that worked out. He was always frail looking, skinny as a rake. Tanned as if he had been in the sun all day skin like leather.

His house was a long way down the road it was down a slight hill to get there, rarely kids would ride their bikes down there like I did once or twice, sometimes kids would go down there to play around at the creek, you could get there easy enough, you had to watch out for snakes and once some of the kids would spook the others by saying, 'If you get bitten by a snake someone would have to go into old Dumpy's place and call an ambulance.' kids didn't like the thought of that and would stay away. The ride back up the hill was a long one as well so that put them off a bit too.

Work would finish and we would close things up and make sure things were left how they should be and we would then lock the front door. On Saturdays we were open until eight o'clock, but other days it was six, Charlie wanted to give people the chance to get last minute things. Some days there would be someone right on six or just after, knocking to get something. We had to say no, Charlie said every time he took pity on someone and let them in after six they took ages to figure out what they wanted. So no exceptions.

One good thing was getting things that were a bit out of date, Charlie would let us take things home, old biscuits, rarely but sometimes some lollies and a bit of cheese he thought was going a bit smelly. That was one thing, we had a few cheeses in the fridge next to the sandwich making part and people would buy a chunk of bunghole as we called it. One of the girls would wander up and say just that 'So what sort of 'bunghole' do you want?' the customer would look at her and say 'What?'

She would then say 'CHEESE, you're looking at the cheese, what one do you want?' I think she just liked seeing their reaction when she said bunghole. I figured out that's a term that relates to old style cheese making where they stick a thing into the cheese to get out a sample for tasting. Any way we would head home out the back door and shut it. Then round the side path and out into the side street through a little white picket gate, not that there was much white on the gate or the fence for that matter, it was long neglected.

I remember the day a sign went up just across the road pointing to a new estate. Nothing actually happened at that point, but someone wanted to sell some house blocks, it took ages for that to actually happen but the sign was there with an arrow and a phone number to call.

In later years there was a 'divvy up' of some land and people started to build new homes, I was never quite sure why, dad suggested it was probably because the land was cheap to buy, it was only about 8 kms to the next town that was way bigger. Why didn't they buy land there? Simple, no one

divided up land over there, well not at that time. I think that there was also a trend to 'move to the country', not much country if your house is jammed onto a small block in my opinion.

I sat back and took a breather...

Gail would say 'That's enough for today, some interesting insights...' Then organise for the next catch up. That was fine, but on the way home my mind kept the story rolling. It was as if I was still talking to her, but in my head. Gail was good to chat to.

Anyway, we were on Alan street, a short walk one block up from our place and you were on the main street, then there was a side street one block across it's called Euston road. There were three or so shops, a general store, a hotel and a shop that the rent must have been so cheap, because shops would open up and close there rather quickly, perhaps people didn't think much about the lack of traffic or people stopping or something but they would open and close again. I think they were mainly out of towners with some sort of a romantic notion. A cafe, a gift shop of homemade nick nacks. Open, closed and gone again in no time.

I sometimes think about those people full of hope and cheer, 'Yeah it'll be great, it'll bring the town to life and all that.' yeah, nah... it never did, I remember one couple set up there, he worked in the next town down the road, her kids had grown up mostly and she was an 'empty nester', wanted something to do, so she opened a shop and I still remember watching her there, it was school holidays and I would ride past on my bike. She would sit there waiting, waiting for customers who rarely if ever came.

There were some customers on weekends as people drove by and went 'Ooh look at that' and would wander in. But she had this thing about not being open on Sunday's, dad said she needed to be open when the customers wanted what she had, that made sense. She could have closed on Monday or even Tuesday as well, but it was deadly quiet.

She kept that place clean, neat and tidy, swept out the front first thing, washed the window regularly and mum said she was a cheery soul. The old shop just stood there, I remember thinking it was once someone's dream to build a shop there, and I wondered if they also thought 'Build it and they will come.' Then the subsequent tenants over all those years, I wonder if they thought the same, 'Build it and they will come.' Some customers came, but it was never enough.

After a while the window didn't get cleaned as often, the front step got swept but I wondered what else started to fade. Did she stop sweeping the floor in the shop? Did she stop straightening the

things on the shelves? Did her relationship with her husband become soured? Did they argue? Were there tears? I wondered how it might feel to be heartbroken having a dream like that simply fade away. What would that emptiness and sense of failure be like?

I'd ride past on my bike and wonder that, how she felt about doing all that work and it just failed. It made me feel a bit sad, I wished I could have told her that too many shops have failed, here, right here, don't do it. But that obviously never happened. Sad really, even now when I see a shop that's empty somewhere I get a tinge of sadness. Especially if the sign on the front doesn't look too old, if it's faded that's a bit different.

I think she may have started a shop there because she was probably bored. 'Oh darling I'm bored, I should do something, like start a shop?' And perhaps he was thinking 'Oh no you don't, just get a job or something...' But no she wanted a shop, perhaps he wanted her to start and fail, to learn a major life lesson or something. Perhaps she was the controlling type who wanted to make her way in the world no matter what her husband said. 'I've decided I'm opening a shop...' Then he would probably say 'Oh that's wonderful dear...'

I think in the end people just got bored trying to run a business there, think about it, you sit there from 9am through to 5.30, waiting, then nothing, it must be so humiliating, imagine telling your friends, and they come and visit, they wish you well and all that, then it just fades. And your bank account empties faster than a bucket of water with holes in it.

Mum said the lady ended up selling the stock she had left over at a local Sunday market two towns away. Lumped all her stuff into a car early on Sundays and took it bit by bit trying to sell it off, bit by bit, to people who probably didn't care that the stuff was below cost. Imagine that, she ended up having to work on Sundays anyway, sad.

I sometimes wonder how long it took for her to get rid of the stuff, and then what was she left with that she had to give away as gifts and the things she had to just use herself. I wonder about a lot of things, that's the nature of this town I guess. I had time to think because there wasn't much to interrupt things. You grow up, you watch, you think about things and move on.

I wondered about how it hurt for her I mean, the notion of 'Yeah let's do this' followed by the hurt created by thinking you were bigger, stronger, like you had the knowledge and everything to run the place and make it viable, but no, it would just plain fade, in the end you would be gutted, the whole thing must have hurt. Then you have your home filled with the last bits and pieces that would

remind you of that time you had that shop, and a garage or shed filled with boxes of more stuff. Sad really.

The shop would empty and the owner would put a sign up, 'for lease' and the whole thing would start over again. At the moment it's empty, a big empty space filled with sad memories, memories of what might have been and what wasn't.

Anyway, across the road from this shop, was an old shop, the sort that was part of a house, the front room being the shop, it was all alone on that side of the road, I never knew what was once in that shop, no one seemed to know, the front had been shut up and changed around. It became the house's living room. The front was a cream colour, a deep dusty apricot cream with streaks in the paint from the weather which made it look older and unloved.

The windows had been painted over as well, except for a thin top section about a foot wide to let some light in. One of my school friends knew the people that had it. I hoped one day I might get to see inside, I wondered what it was like, how the light came in through the top of the window and if they had a big TV in there and what else was there and so on.

I wondered if the owners of that original shop were like, 'Nah it's no good as a shop, let's call it quits and just make it another room in the house.' That would have been smart thinking and a talking point when people dropped in to say hi. 'Yeah it used to be a shop and now it's our living room... Nice hey.'

There was also a mechanic in the main street, with a servo on that side of the road that had petrol as the main thing it sold, and the mechanic who seemed to be able to fix anything, old man Smith, deaf as a post, people had to shout at him to get him to hear or understand. His kids ran the servo, two boys, Harry and Tim. On the weekends it could get quite busy. We think they were slow to change the petrol prices compared to the next town along, therefore out of towners would drop in and fill up.

Farmers would take things to old man Smith, he figured out how to fix almost anything it seemed. Harry followed in his footsteps and became his apprentice, so the business keeps going. And old Tim, he didn't fix much but could change oil, serve petrol and stuff like that. The major stuff was left to Harry in the end.

The primary school was down a side street on that side, down Eamon's lane. The teacher's house was next door. An old Edwardian brick building. Varying teachers would treat the place

differently, sometimes a fantastic array of coloured flowers in the front garden bed and other times it was just grass with a weedy garden.

Mum said you could soon figure out if the new teacher who lived in the house was positive and a 'good egg' or if they were just there because they had to be. Mum often said 'Oh so and so, they're a good egg.'

In town there was a kind of a rivalry, two old families formed the backbone of the early town in the early days, The Euston's and the Eamon's, therefore the street names. Both had history going back a few world wars ago, the place was built in the early to mid 1800's I think and streets named after famous people in the area, well famous to some, perhaps infamous to others.

Rumours had it that the early settlers wiped out, or had others wipe out... the local indigenous population. Not many details on that. But it was more than likely true. Kill some people and get a street named after you. Truth be known, I think the streets should have been named after some local first nations people. Perhaps back then no one probably bothered to figure out the spelling of their names, or even bothered to know their names. They were seen as unimportant I guess. Sixty thousand or so years of history and no street named after you.

Nunga lane, Woorabindy ave, nulla nulla street, I think the place would be more interesting with names like that. No one seems to care. The area would have had a good number of first nations folk living here at one stage, there was a river and a few creeks that ran into it all close by, then good stands of trees and hills that formed a pleasant area that would have created a nice place to live, I can imagine a humpy or two with smoke rising from a campfire, or some such romantic notion of how they lived. Until someone came along and poisoned you, shot you or somehow made you 'go away'. Sad that, you live there for a long time, you and your people and then some white guy comes along and does you in. It's really sad.

Anyway, there are still some areas that back onto a state forest, Kangaroos were still readily seen there along with the occasional Wallaby, Wombat and Koalas for those who bothered to go and look. From the top of the grassy hill at the park you could look back from there and see the edge of the bush.

Anyway the area had two main families. Old man Euston, when he was much younger, would come to the school and tell us about the early days of the town, usually during history week I think. They ran sheep mainly, their property had a wool shed and so forth. H P Euston. Dad said his first

name was Henry but what the P stood for we never knew, it could have been Percy, Peter, Paul, Patrick or any one of a number of other names.

Whenever he came the stories became a little longer, I remember his voice at times rather croaky, then things got a little more animated, me, I would sit and wonder what his middle name was. At recess some of the boys had their own stories they had been told by their parents and grandparents and they contradicted old man Euston's stories. H P Euston, some days I still wonder what his middle name is sometimes.

The boys would say, 'Yeah, nah my old man recons they never had many sheep...' Another would then say, 'Nah yeah, they did have sheep but not as many chickens as he says they had.' this would go back and forth for a while and then fade out.

The next year the same thing would happen except they would have other stories to run down, 'Nah that never happened here, it was two towns over at his Brother's place.' and so on. I still wondered about his middle name, as he spoke I never really got the details of his stories my mind would wander, Percy, Paul, Peter, Patrick... then I would see something out the window a bird or something, or in the science display cabinet where we had lizards and such, something would move, a leaf or a lizard and it would catch my eye. I was easily distracted, I still am.

The Eamons on the other hand didn't get a look in, their lineage had run out some time back, they moved on, folded up, and just plain disappeared. Some suggested they were here looking for gold, others said they made their money from gold, and helped to establish this fine town with the money they made, a town now loaded with older people slowly fading out. They get old, then get moved on to an old folks home one town over, no need for one here, well not yet anyway, give it a bunch of years as the new people on the new estate will get that way.

The new part of town was interesting, you could ride past on a bike and check out people's dreams and all that, all on a small block of land that had some of the locals wondering what the new people would do on such a small block. They packed them in like sardines, I figured they didn't have to do that, but perhaps it was just greed on behalf of the developers, Mum agreed.

The older houses had much bigger blocks, more than the average quarter acre job you normally saw in towns, some were an acre or so. Given that they were bigger, few people did much with that space, some had a garden full of veggies and the rest of the space was for backyard cricket, but that only happened around Christmas time it seemed.

Then there were the footy kickers that didn't want to go to the local oval, no point really, it was on the edge of town and by the time you rode a bike there you could have kicked your ball a few times in your backyard, and so that's what most kids did.

The oval had the local hall, built after one of the wars way back in the year whoopity whoop. No one used it, except as a polling place during elections. Old Mrs Smith who lived next to the general store had the key, but she had gone a long time ago to the old folks place.

I can imagine the new people that bought her house looking at some key hanging on a nail in her house that they couldn't figure out what it was for, I could have told them, but they never asked. I wonder if it's still there? I saw it once, it was on a rough loop of string that was quite worn, with a tattered cardboard tag on it that probably once said 'town hall.'

She opened it up every now and then when one of the council workers got the job of sweeping the place out, prior to an election I guess. I was going by with one of my friends. We were on our bikes one school holiday, riding by, just by chance we stopped as they headed across the road with the key on a string. It's funny how I remember things like that.

Mrs Smith always seemed to have on one of those old style aprons with a frilly edge across the shoulders and a big pocket at the front. She also had a veggie garden which I thought was kind of odd, because there was only her in that house, her husband, old Jack had 'kicked the bucket' years ago, she was left to plod on all this time, but she still kept the garden going. Mum said it helped to keep her busy, I don't think she had much money after Jack died, she could be out there for ages working the garden.

The veggie gardens in peoples backyards started to fade out as supermarkets carried more veggies at lower prices and for all the hassle of growing you could buy the things easier than all that setting up, planting, watering and then harvesting. Mum argued the flavour was better, me I'm not so sure, nor did I care much, especially as a kid, it just seemed like hard work.

Chapter Two

Gail would start off, and away I would chat, but this time she said 'Hold on there's something missing, here, it's as if you have jumped over some things am I right?' I told her 'Well, you should have been there, in my mind on the way home. Now I'm up to the bit about people's backyards.' She smiled slightly and said 'Oh Okay, go on...' I'm not sure she liked missing out on the story but hey, she started it.

Each yard either had the obligatory 'hills hoist' clothes line or a long run of two sturdy wires for the clothes line, old school style. As a youngster I recall people putting things out on their lines at about 9.30 in the morning, there was enough sunshine by then, and if it rained mum would call out to the neighbours 'It's Raining!'

Sometimes she knew the people next door were out and so I would run up and take down the washing before it got too wet, sometimes the rain would get heavier and you had to leave some of the things on the line. A frantic rush to get things in

Most of the yards had a simple wire fence which made it easier when it did rain to get into the neighbour's yard to bring in the washing. You could see most of what was in people's yards, some who had dogs would have a dog house, with a chain for the dog so it didn't run off.

Back in the day most people didn't walk their dogs much, well not on a lead anyway, most who had dogs, the dog would simply, dutifully follow them to the shop, sit and wait and then follow the person home. If the dog was approached by a stranger, a quick nip by the dog ensured that you didn't touch the dog, one nip seemed to be enough for kids to get the hint.

Old Charlie who ran the shop, would usually be the first to hear about some dog nipping at some kid out the front of the shop. He would simply look at the person and say, 'Oh yeah, and did the dog say 'come on over and pat me?' Nah I think not, let that be a lesson for you, let's hope the dog didn't catch anything...' That was usually the end of that, out of towners would make a noise and leave in a huff. The dogs had an unwritten rule I think, one nip and you were good. All the locals told their kids to not pat the dogs, especially in the main street. I think it was mostly out of towners who got nipped.

Our house had a big block like the rest, the street that ran across one side, it was at an angle, so we had this spot next to the house that was a small triangle, a big old tree nearer to the house and then the yard would widen out as you headed out of town, down the back. Dad said the street that ran at an angle was there first and the divvying up of the other blocks came second, so we ended up with the triangle block, as did some others further down, naturally enough.

The side yard was kind of weird, it was never used for anything, it was fenced off separately, dad said it was always like that, separate. He said it had an old tree that was struck by lightning ages back and had burnt down mostly.

The ground there was always dry, if there was a good rainy season there would be a bit of greenery, but never much. The big tree to one side looked as though it had been there forever, it occasionally dropped branches but rarely did one land in the triangular yard, no one really noticed that except for me. I wrote a story about it when I was in grade four or five I think.

The teacher thought it was an interesting subject, other kids in the class thought it was a dumb topic for a story. I got teased a bit for it. 'Write any good stories lately Linda?' or 'Here she comes, the girl with words about an old tree and a triangle...' Usually followed by 'She's a poet and don't know it.' I smiled and continued on.

That afternoon, it was just before Easter, dad was on holidays, he took some days before Easter to beat the madness of holiday makers. He came by school to pick me up. One of the boys, Travis Morena, was making noises about my writing and so on. I ignored him but Dad had the side window down on the car, he heard him, and it was clear that Travis was focused on me. I got into the car and Dad looked at me, said hi, and then said 'Who is that scrubby little runt?' He then had his eyes transfixed on Travis, Travis saw that and his cheery bullying smile faded fast.

'It's Travis.' I said. Dad got out of the car rather smartly. I hadn't seen him move so fast. He called out 'Hey Travis...' Travis froze in his boots, dad walked over and leant on the wire fence, arms folded and had a chat. It didn't take too long, Travis turned and walked away, then dad just stood there for a bit, Travis looked around, dad stood there keeping eye contact. Dad came back to the car, I asked what he said, 'Oh not much, just a chat 'man to man' as they say. If he bothers you again or any of his mates they will be watching their backs for a LONG time to come.' Travis and his silly mates didn't come near me, ever again. I guess it was like verbal self defence of sorts, or maybe offence?

At sports events and so on if Travis was there dad would make sure he was seen, and would sometimes even stand near the kid, sometimes just for a short while but he made his presence known. No one was going to upset his kid, dad was good like that.

Chapter Three

Anyway, I liked to write. 'Wait, you just went from Travis to writing... I'm curious about what happened there?' Oh, oops, well not much I guess, it really led to nowhere, Dad looked out for me and that's a good thing I guess, until I could stand on my own two feet as such.

'Oh okay, go on.'

So sometimes I'd write some poetry, about things I notice, and then a story, usually short, my mind would race off and my pen never seemed to be able to catch up with my thoughts, so the story would end, sometimes rather abruptly. Sometimes at two in the morning I would be awake and think of an ending to some story, I never got up to write those endings down, by the morning they were gone, or I had lost interest. I was too lazy to be bothered to get up and write, not at two am.

I could keep to myself and be amused, reading, writhing, a doodle here and there. Mum would say, my mind would 'run off with the faeries'. She and or dad would rarely read the stories and such, I never cared much if they did or didn't, one afternoon, it was a Saturday, I left a piece of writing on the dining room table, I had been jotting down things and in walking through to do something else I left the papers on the table, I completely forgot about them, did a couple of other things. Mum had a break from fiddling around and sat with a cup of tea to enjoy a break, so she had a read.

It was something that turned out quite well: a story about two boys playing, they were discussing their journeys in their toy cars and things like that. Mum thought it was brilliant and wanted to know more.

I kept lots of the stories, I had this cardboard box with a lid, it was a shoe box at one stage, we got to decorate things one day in craft class and so I jazzed up this box. It was now a polka dotted bright box. In there were all, well most, of my writings, just one on top of the other. Sometimes I would go back through and read some.

Well Mum asked if she could read some of the stories and I thought little of it. It was a few days later and she got stuck into reading, apparently she sat on the end of my bed with the box taking in my wordy meanderings. I came home from School and she was all smiles, she couldn't believe I had such an amazing imagination, I didn't think so, my mind was still unwinding from school a bit worn out. I did note her 'cheerful disposition'. And at dinner she had selected two pieces of poetry she thought were simply lovely.

She read them to dad, he was half interested and then some of the words seemed to catch him and by the end of the second piece he was smiling too. I remember he sat back in his chair, smiled and said, 'That's really lovely' there was a bit of silence after that. It was nice that they liked them but not too much of a big deal for me. I guess I was lucky, if the writing turned out ok, I was happy, if it didn't, oh well, and if others showed interest, well I guess that was a bonus.

Here's one she pulled out

The Tree, the House, and Me

There's an old tree beside our house,
With branches wide for birds and a mouse.
It creaks and sways when the wind blows hard,
Like it's whispering secrets from up in the clouds.

Our house is small with a deep blue front door,
And flowers bloom right by the floor.
Yellow and pink, they dance in the sun,
I talk to them sometimes—just for fun.

An old bike leans on the garden wall,
Its bell still rings, though it's rusty and all.
Daddy says it was his when he was small—
I ride it real slow so I don't fall!

So that's my world, quiet and sweet,
With petals and wheels and grassy feet.
The tree, the house, the bike, the bloom—
All of them fit in my heart like a room.

Mum read that out beautifully, I smiled and got back to eating my dinner. It's what I did, I wrote things.

Sometimes I think the house and family things helped me to be so interested in creating things, doodles, writing, stories and so on. The house was always filled with warmth, intrigue and music.

Mum would put on the radio, it was on top of the fridge, and we would have classical music from the ABC, it seemed to be the only radio station we could get locally that had a strong enough signal, mind you we never tried to tune the radio to anything else. Mum never let us, or if we suggested it, she would flip the tuning knob back and forth and all we got was a bunch of hisses and pops. I think she skipped other stations and didn't want to change. Then she would turn it off for a while as if that was our punishment for not agreeing with her musical taste.

The classical music was on from just before breakfast so we would hear the news at 8am and then the music started again. Dad never seemed to really mind, he got to listen to the radio in his car on the way to work and back again, so he knew more about modern songs and such. Mum, she

plodded along, the music was mostly soothing, if it got too raucous or dark she would either turn the volume down or turn it off.

Mind you if dad got annoyed about something he would mention the classical music. 'Rachael for god sake, can you turn that bloody music off!' She would turn it down and when he left the room it would be about 30 secs later the volume would go up a bit. I reckon you could time that and be spot on, 30 seconds.

Dad rarely got annoyed, a quiet type, he would mull things over, Mum was more outspoken in her quiet country town Mum kind of way, a few deftly thought out casual words that summed up whatever the situation was. Mainly topics that got them riled up were things to do with finance, the government, or dad's work. I guess there were other 'personal things' that annoyed them, oh they loved each other, but you could tell that there were times when things were not so good. The silence could be deafening as they say.

As you grow up you notice things like that, you figure out when to be silent, watch and listen, then either break the silence or know when not to do that. And you had to be careful about what words you used or the topic you raised to break that silence.

Mum worked a few days a week, as a bookkeeper for an accountant in town, it seemed to be a very flexible arrangement. She would go over there on Tuesdays, get there about 9:30 and leave by 3pm, if they were busy she would do three days, if not, just one and a bit. Dad was strictly 9 - 5. He worked in a government office, he called it the great paper shuffle. I went there one day with Mum, it was school holidays and we all went out for lunch at George's Cafe in the main street.

The offices he worked in had deep brown Linoleum floors, polished to a high gloss. The offices had glass windows that started up a bit from the floor. Dad had one of the offices about half way down the corridor in a set of about six offices, at the end was the typing pool, where four ladies typed out things, letters I guess, perhaps invoices and work instructions.

There were talks about things changing and computers would be used to write things on. No one seemed to know why, the typewriters seemed to do okay for all these years, but, head office wanted to bring in computers. Dad said at lunch that a few of the staff would be sent to town for training, but no one knew when the computers would come and how many there would be.

Some of the staff were feeling 'challenged' and not at all sure if they wanted these things in their lives. Lunch was nice. Dad had organised with his boss to have a bit longer than usual.

Cucumber sandwiches and some cake. I remember the sign on the place we ate at, it was in gold and arched so the words were spread out. From here you could see clean across the centre green square in the centre of town. It was a pleasant change of scenery.

After lunch, Mum and I did some shopping and then we drove home. I didn't realise it then but having two cars was quite a big thing. Now of course it's nothing. The drive was steady and quiet, not much to say I guess, I had a sense of contentment that everything was just really nice.

Chapter Four

If I was in the kitchen at our place I could look out over the sink and see the triangular yard out the window, no comparison to the park I just mentioned, It was dry, the ground was straw and grey coloured and it was almost like the rain only fell on our side of the fence I swear there is a distinct line of green on this side of the fence and dead on the other.

In that yard were two pieces of timber, big old grey chunks of wood that no one had ever bothered about. Dad said they were all that were left of the old three that burnt down.

'Wait, hang on a second, you did it again, you jumped from one subject to another, one minute you were in the car and content and now you're talking about standing in the kitchen, how come?' Said Gail.

Oh my mind wanders, finished with one thing then I go on to another. I think it's that thing called ADHD or some such, is it wrong?

'No it's not wrong, I just wondered if you noticed it.' She said, Oh yeah I notice it, sometimes people stop me, like you just did and go 'Whoa Linda, go back a step' or maybe 'Hang on a minute what just happened.' Mum said I did it quite often, some teachers said the same when it was pointed out. Anyway...

I remember thinking how lonely those chunks of wood looked, one was a curved piece that was half round along its length, like the inside had been scooped out. Then the other was a more solid stumpy piece, they had that lovely grey surface, soft yet hard at the same time.

I wondered why they were never picked up and used as firewood. We would get a load of wood delivered, then dad, or sometimes mum would chop it up and use it on the fires in the house. But these two pieces in the side yard never got a look in. One day I grabbed a piece of rope, tied it to one end of

the curved piece and tried to drag it. No luck, it was so heavy I could barely budge it, I gave up on that idea.

I had a go as a kid, chopping the wood that is, splitting up some of the blocks, it was always 'good Aussie hardwood' as dad would say. We had this big log splitting axe and a smaller axe, they were always next to the wood pile, the splitter had a bit of damage to the handle where the wood being split had hit it and caused splinters, I remember you had to watch out for the splinters.

I whacked at a stump for a while and gave up. I went back inside, mum asked if I did any good, nope... no luck, 'Old man stumpy was too stubborn today.' Mum smiled and even amongst what she was happily doing in the kitchen, she briefly downed tools then headed out through the squeaky screen door, a few solid whacks and the job was done, old man stumpy saw her coming and gave in I guess.

Mum could put on a determined face and you just had to give in, dad said the same from time to time. 'You either move out of the way and stay out of the way, or you have to apologise and do whatever it was she had asked you to do in the first place, the silence that came from non compliance wasn't worth it.'

Mum was a beautiful soul, and dad for that matter, but you wouldn't want to upset things, otherwise you would know about it. She was quick to forgive and had a quiet way about her, very organised and straight forward.

Anyway, I was straight out the back and bought the split wood in. Dad was home a bit later and split enough wood for the rest of the night's heating on the lounge room fire. If he had things on his mind from work you knew it because he would chop more wood than needed, Mum knew, she could then gently chat to him about work, by this stage he had already mulled over what was bothering him and it made it easier to discuss. Sometimes, rarely mind you, he wouldn't say anything, Mum knew better than to push the issue.

Then there were Saturdays, dad would get out and whack away at old stumpy and his friends and make an extra pile for the winter, and the times when the rain prevented them from chopping during the week, especially if the weather forecast was for rain. The crack of the log splitter rang out across the yard.

I think others got the hint and did the same, figuring 'Old man Dixon knows a thing or two, if he's splitting wood then that's a sign for the rest of us to do the same.' I don't know if that was true or not but it seemed that way to me.

Our kitchen fire was a small silver pot belly stove I guess you would say. I never saw another one like it, all the others I saw as a kid, were always black. That somehow made sense after all.

Ours, Mum would paint on some heat proof silver paint to keep it looking good, she seemed to do that more towards the end of the spring season, paint it, then open the window and back door to let the air in because it would stink out the room with the paint hardening from the heat of the fire.

I would come home from school and know that the thing had been painted. I remember one year she called dad at work to bring home takeaway food when he came home, as the kitchen was still a 'bit iffy'. I suggested she paint the thing more often so we could have more takeaway food, that got a laugh.

Friends who dropped over would mention the pot belly heater, 'Never seen a silver one.' Mum would sometimes say 'Yeah nah, it's a special one that.'

Not that I had many friends, Julie and Hannah, then a girl I didn't really like and thank god her family moved on. She was a bit of a nutter I thought, dad pointed that out to Mum one day, he thought he said it quietly enough that I didn't hear him. Karla, her dad was part of some big company that got short term contracts to install machinery all over the place, so they moved about a bit sometimes. This time it was about nine months.

Karla I figured out later on, was manipulative, she could get things to go her way or there might be tears, her tears you had to watch carefully to see if they were about to happen, she would stop and have a stupid face and then a type of sobbing would start, it was a bit unnerving at times.

The other girls would drop over but would first look to see if Karla's bike was in our front yard. If it was, they would ride straight by, sometimes, not always, I guess it depended on how bored they were.

Anyway Karla had this bike that had streamers that hung off the handlebars, they were faded now. She would put the bike to the right hand side of the front steps and walk up to the front door and knock. Mum would say 'Ah here's Karla..' then shake her head in disbelief, no one ever came to the front door, in our town everyone went to the back door, it was like an unwritten law.

You would open the door and there was Karla, bang in the middle of the doorway, sometimes she stood really close to the door so when you opened it she was right in your face. I soon figured that I would have to open the door by standing back as far as I could in case she did that.

On one occasion dad had been doing some work in the front yard and had left the key in the door so he could go in and out easily. Karla arrived, didn't knock, turned the key and walked straight in, through the front entrance and into the kitchen.

Mum was baking, heard the door open and close and then Karla arrived, Mum had tilted her head with some degree of interest, knowing dad had gone out the back, so she was surprised that the door sound happened.

'Oh hello Karla love, how are you?' She said, probably with a quizzically raised eyebrow. Karla walked over and stood next to mum and said 'I'm fine thanks, and you Mrs Dixon, how are you?' Mum replied, 'Yes, thanks, I'm fine.' Karla just stood there in silence watching, no further conversation was entered into.

Mum went back to stirring the mix she had in her bowl, now, she probably looked straight ahead, she did that sometimes, and called out to me. 'Linda, Karla's here...' Karla didn't enquire as to what Mum was making, she just stood there.

I walked in and said hi. I asked what Mum was making, Anzac biscuits was the answer. 'Mum looked sideways at Karla and said 'Do you eat Anzac biscuits dear?' Karla just said one word sort of slowly, 'Yes.'

We wandered off and did some doodling at the desk in my room, there was some chatter, Karla could be rather negative at times and so sometimes she repelled people rather than attracting them. 'This room is cold, it's always cold, my room is warm.' Then other times she could hold a lovely chatty conversation and ask about how you were and things of interest, but this time, 'cold'.

All of a sudden she would be finished with you and say, 'Bye now.' and leave. Some days this would be followed with 'Bye Mrs Dixon, see you later.' Mum would reply with 'Oh bye Karla love, bye now.' It could be deadly abrupt. She would let herself out the front door and ride off. Mum would ask if I did anything to upset her, nope, I never dared.

One day Karla shut the door but it ‘bounced’ and was wide open after she left. I came by about an hour later to see it wide open, mum was not impressed. Mum asked her the very next day, 'Karla, did you not see that the front door stayed open, after you shut it?' Karla was silent for that nasty little fraction of time and said, 'Oh, it closed, I was there, it was closed...' Mum didn't want to argue but knew the kid was either not aware or directly lying. Karla just blinked once and kept her blank stare.

A few times, she was here before Julie and Hannah had dropped in, they came through the back door into the kitchen, Karla stopped mid sentence and looked at them strangely for a second, one time she looked across to the front door and then back at them, they said hi and she said hi back, but in an inquisitive way. Something seemingly connected with 'What's wrong with the front door?'

She had a birthday party one time, the invite said, 'Enter by the front door only.' Mum shook her head at that one. Mind you Karla's folks seemed okay, Karla, she was certainly different. Dad said many years later that he thought she would be most likely to end up on one of those TV documentaries about being a murderer or some such.

He said they could play some creepy music as this girl in a flowing clean floral dress rode by on her bike, with the streamers flapping in the breeze. A bloodied knife wrapped in a plastic bag in the front basket, next to that would be a small rag doll, with a smile on its face. Mum nodded slowly in agreement, hanging on every detail that dad dished out. She then slowly said as she breathed out 'Oh yeah...' then shook her head.

An add on to that was Karla's cat, Bertie, I was over at her place once and the cat was a cute little thing, Karla had it about six months and it died. She didn't at all appear sad about it. Mum asked her a few questions sometimes when she dropped in. 'On Karla, how's your cat doing?' Karla was watching mum cook, and simply, dryly said 'It died..' there was no explanation, mum was a bit shocked and said 'Oh dear I'm sorry to hear that Karla love...' Karla when asked anything more about it went silent, then would finally say, 'Things live, things die.'

Hannah asked her one day, she got the same response, Karla, then quietly walked over to her bike and rode off, no good byes that day. She was in my yard for about five minutes I think. Hannah looked at me wide mouthed. Then asked me 'Do you know what happened?' My response was, 'Nope, and I don't want to ask.'

Chapter Five

Julie and Hannah on the other hand were perfectly lovely girls, still friends, we sometimes mention Karla and Hannah will say something like, 'Okay that's enough about her...' Then we move on, she also thought the girl was creepy. Julie just smiled and changed the subject.

Our lives have moved on, just like life itself, Hannah married Brock, Julie was in a long term relationship with Ray. And here I am reminiscing about the old days. Yeah I'm single and pleased about that, too many idiot guys in the world wanting to get their hands on things they probably shouldn't, well not right away. I've had a couple of boy friends but nah, not my thing really.

I always had good morals, standards that stand strong over time. At Uni I saw too many bad things happen to girls, things would go from happy to tragic too fast. It was nasty and I didn't want any of that. They ran self defence classes and I got right into that. I watched films on other tactics that could be used and aimed to keep a creative edge to how we would respond to tackling people in sparring and practicing moves to ward off an attacker.

There were various parties and events at Uni and in the early part of the year the Orientation Week saw many youngsters come and mix in with the others who had been here for a while, second year students and beyond.

The aim was to figure out where things were, how things happened and so forth at the Uni. Among that were fun activities, a BBQ, a band or two and handouts from various clubs and societies that you could join. Often these day time events spilled over into a few extra drinks and then things got to be either good fun or sometimes not so fun.

This is usually where the bad things happened, kids that didn't know any better, some were quite naive and so things would end up in tears, some of the 'kids', mainly girls, would end up going home, tail between their legs disappointed with their UNI experience. The guys who messed these kids up didn't care, they knew what they could get away with.

Handling a youngster in the car park in the dark as they went to their car heading home from having a good time. The Uni said they had security staff to escort people to their cars and that was true, but the new 'kids' didn't want to bother with all that, their naivety turned to dread fast.

It was sad to watch, and it didn't seem to matter if they were told to watch out for predatory behaviour or not, they would get spotted as a victim and were preyed upon. Simply put, it was sad.

On one occasion some stupid guys got more than they bargained for, one of the 'kids' had an older brother in third year. He watched her like a hawk, he wanted her to have a good time, not a bad time. He and his mates watched out for his little sister, she had no idea they were watching. A couple of idiots primed her with a few drinks. Then they were advised to stop by one of her brothers' mates.

They didn't stop, soon after there was a black eye and a bunch of badly bruised egos. In later years this kind of predatory behaviour faded to some degree but it was still there, males wanting to get in on some action with the young girls. I feel for those who had their dreams broken. It was really sad in my eyes.

One year I suggested to the powers that be that in Orientation Week they distribute brochures raising awareness of predatory behaviours, that fell on deaf ears, then my suggestion of running self defence classes early got some traction but the turnout was too low to continue. People didn't see the need I guess, until it was too late.

One thing I learnt early on was that I am good at verbally dealing with an 'attacker', the aim being to put them off wanting to attack, simply using words. It's useful to confuse people at times, they get lost in their own thoughts and next thing you know that's all over and you're on your way. I later heard a self-defense guy call it 'Verbal JuJitsu.'

In Secondary school we did some public speaking as part of English studies and we did a range of verbal exercises to build our confidence with speaking to groups. One of the exercises was to create a dada poem, you select a bunch of nonsensical words and phrases and hack them together to make a silly poem, mine usually ended up sounding too silly so I went another step and made them lead people in some crazy direction, like walking down a street and then finding a rabbit hole, they fall and all of a sudden the space between their fingers becomes wider as they look harder then find the moon is big and all blue... or something weird like that.

They were generally fun things that caused people to giggle, in a good way, usually very nonsensical. Anyway the teacher liked that I could take things a bit further than the rest of the class. She said it showed more thought and interest in the topic. Anyway I was able to confuse people by creating weird tangents to go off on.

Sometimes I make up things in my head looking at a scene and imagine a vastly different outcome than what I was seeing and then imagine I'm describing the scene to someone, I think it's kind of creative. But one thing is for sure it can catch people off guard, a simple form of confusion. At

self defence training, we tried it as part of the verbal response to start with so you could hopefully talk the person out of doing any harm to you.

'Yes I agree that is rather creative, I have heard a few Dadaist poems before, they can be rather bizarre. So can we pick up from here next time we catch up?' said Gail.

I wondered a bit what Gail thought, she took a few notes but not a lot I thought. I was starting to notice little things in her office more, things she did or didn't do and things on her desk and shelves. I could chat merrily away and have a second train of thought, like two halves of my brain were doing different stuff and I was able to separate the two.

There were a pair of bookends which were timber hand carved monkeys, I remember thinking there should be a third one, see no evil, hear no evil see no evil, but of course there were only two. I also thought they were a bit small for bookends and wouldn't hold much in place if they had bigger books between them. They were a bit creepy I thought, not in a well lit area of Gail's office.

Session over I'm on my way home, the receptionist had her coat on, ready to leave once I paid my bill, printout done I'm off as was she, the door closed behind me and click the door was locked. It was getting late, and this part of the street, although nice in the full light of day, it was much darker at this time of day, the trees in the street blocked out a lot of light, there had been light rain so the scene could be out of one of those sad films, a melancholy look.

I took a breath and headed off, a couple of cars swished by, the receptionist had gone the other way, I think her car was in the side car park. T turned out the clinic had a policy of having two people in the building until the last client left, smart thinking I thought. On the way home I pondered if I was a threat to Gail, no I didn't think so, I could picture people being a threat, but not me.

I had a sleepless kind of a night, thinking about getting to the bus on the way home, how dreary things were, and then the notion of someone doing something nasty to a professional like Gail in their office. The world sure is a strange place.

Chapter Six

It would be a week later, I liked chatting to Gail, even though this would only be our third catch up, I always felt at ease, the first session was more back and forth, she would ask a question and I would respond, occasionally she would change that about and she would say 'Ok, so now you ask me a question.' I did, I asked about things in her office. There were a range of small items behind glass in

a frame on the wall like little nick nacks she had collected and were somehow precious. Things like that.

The week in between was uneventful, work as per usual and some TV and watching people on public transport, that always cracks me up.

Here I am at the front of her office, three steps up onto the front porch, a ring of the bell and walk in. A few offices here down the hallway and a reception area at the front. I think the reception lady was not overly interested and could fake a smiley hello and then get back to her computer screen. You would then wait in an open side area, the door had been taken off. There was a framed quote in a solid timber frame that said. *'The beginning is the most important part of the work.'* - Plato

The building was old, with lots of timber details, like a bunch of offices in this part of the street, the front door had leadlight on either side that was fairly simple. The place had been 'done up' at some stage but I guess that was a few years ago now. I figure the place was once a home with like a doctor's room and waiting room at the front, as was the style at the time. If I had to guess, I think early Federation style.

Often I didn't have to wait long, I would be barely seated and Gail would come down the hall, I could hear her heels come down the old timber floor in the hallway. Interesting that I never saw anyone else in the waiting room.

A cheery person Gail, smiling, warm and welcoming.

'Hey Linda, come through. How has your week been?'

There would be some chatter about things and if anything happened to make things better or worse than the previous catch up. She would do a quick recap and I was back into our chat. I think she found it interesting that I could pick up where I left off, well almost.

'I guess some would say I was a bit of a Tomboy growing up, which added to my interest in defending myself, being more physical and such, I rode my bike way more than other girls did, mind you many of them just walked about, they probably didn't need to go far, I saw that a bike could get you to places faster and further, that made more sense to me.'

Gail interrupted, 'Wait, last time we ended on chatting about causing confusion as part of self defence, and now you're talking about being a Tomboy? What happened?'

I looked at her, tilted my head slightly and said 'Well after I left here last week the conversation carried on, I moved on from where we were at and now I'm here. I was on the bus then the train and things moved on. So now I'm on my bike, you could get to places faster, if you needed to...'

Gail didn't stop me, she just let it go and now had her trusty notebook and pencil, she didn't use a pen, It turned out she preferred a pencil, pens could leak and make a mess. Anyway I chatted on.

That often meant I ended up hanging out with some of the boys at times. I could see they did things differently to girls. They could ride quite far and do things girls didn't do. I wasn't much into playing with dolls and all that so the boys were an interesting change from girls activities.

Boys could draw a line in the dirt where bullants were about and stir up the ants with a stick. They would whack one or two of the ants, an injured ant would retreat into the ant hole and a heap of the ants would come out and attack. Stupid stuff but it's where I figured out boys were sometimes stupid and silly and wanted to take risks and there I was watching, and I loved it when a bullant got to a guy's ankle and bit hard, those boys who got bitten learnt some dance moves fairly fast!

The aim was to belt the ants with the stick and keep them at a distance. The welts that showed up after someone got bitten was amazing, those ants especially the BIG bullants really left their mark, I would have a laugh.

Yep a Tomboy, if there was a scrap between some boys in the school yard I was often one of the only girls standing watching as they beat into each other. It was fascinating. Some of the girls would yell out to them to stop, and would get a teacher to come and break things up.

As a kid, on the TV there was wrestling at lunch time on Saturday and Sunday, Mum didn't know what I saw in it while watching it, dad didn't care too much. But I picked up a thing or two. I got into a bit of strife one day at school, I got a boy into a headlock, he was being mean to some other kid and I had this scene run through my head, like it was something from the wrestling show, So I 'created' the scene and took it further. I ran up from behind him, jumped and grabbed him in this headlock and then dropped him to the floor.

Gees it felt good. It took a bit for one of the teachers to get me to let go, I had a good hold and wasn't about to give up my position. I wanted someone to watch and see if he would 'tap out' like they did on the TV, he didn't though, he just got up rather dazed wondering what had happened. Me I

sprang to my feet, like I was really wound up. Someone clapped and I took a bow, really funny. The kid was a bit dizzy after that.

Anyway I got into trouble for that, I was told off by Mr Wilkinson the Principal 'That's no way for a girl to act!' I didn't say it but I felt like it was a fine way to act, someone being mean, that needed to be sorted out. After that I was known as the girl who could give a mean 'flying headlock'. Being a bit of a tomboy was useful at times.

There was no phone call home, no issue with the kid I headlocked etc, the good old days. The boys took note, some of the girls thought it was disgusting, I figured they just hadn't yet felt the adrenaline rush which comes with getting involved and sorting a few things out.

Riding about with the boys, they knew I was not the sort to have a bike with a pink basket, or have steamers on the handle bars. There was a sense of respect I guess, they knew that I would be ready to rumble if the need arose. So they let me tag along, sometimes it was okay, then if they got too stupid I rode off, 'See ya guys...' And I didn't lag behind either, I would ride up with them to some stupid spot, part of the bunch, sometimes I even took the lead as we headed off to the old quarry or some other place like the railway line track, no railway there now just the track. I think I was quite competitive at times.

I could climb trees too, yeah, such a Tomboy. In the summer at the park you could be up a smaller tree to the side of the bigger trees, hidden in the green canopy of leaves and simply watch people and things, the coming and going of people and things. On those days I walked to the park, people didn't see the bike and therefore I didn't have to keep an eye on it. One and a bit blocks, no biggie. I would just get a feeling about it, 'time to go climb a tree or two.' A bit like my ability to deal with time, I could always pick when it was 2.30pm, I was usually within about ten minutes either side, but close enough.

Gail stopped me 'Oops, Linda, you're off on a tangent again, one minute you are up a tree and then guessing the time?'

I looked at her and said 'Well you didn't want to be up a tree longer than about 2.30 that would mean you were there too long.' I carried on. Sometimes I think I forgot that Gail was even there in the room, my mind would blurt out whatever it wanted to and I was quite happy about that.

Anyway, the dappled light through the tree leaves was always soothing.

Session over, something about the way Gail interrupted me got me thinking on the way home. Maybe there's something wrong with jumping from one thing to another, mind you Gail seemed curious rather than annoyed about it, and I wasn't sure about how I felt. I guess I didn't mind, ideas would come and go in my head.

Like at school I could be so distracted, sometimes I would write some silly poem in Maths and then spot something out the window and for goodness sake the teacher was a stupid idiot anyway. He had no idea about Maths, he kept screwing up stupid formulas and things and the bright kids had to question him about 'How does that work?' They would ask, and then he would check it and say 'Oh yeah I got it a bit wrong, glad someone's watching.'

At parent teacher night he said I was doing okay, he actually had no idea about how anyone was doing unless you were one of the bright kids. I liked that things were a blur for him, sometimes it meant I could daydream all I liked.

Maths took me a long time to come to terms with. Dad figured it out once helping me with some homework, he said 'You don't seem to get any maths homework?' After that he made up some things to do with numbers, he got an idea about where we were meant to be and got me thinking better about it and actually managed to sort out some of the things.

The next year we got another maths teacher, she was a different type of idiot, but she at least knew where I wasn't up to... Yeah something like that.

My train was at my station, again it was late, the winter light meant it was dark sooner, a bunch of people got off and I was soon off across the carpark and heading up my street. The time had flown, I don't even recall walking from Gail's place to the bus and then to the train station, I guess it was rather unremarkable. Not even sure about ending the session with Gail.

Chapter Seven

In the summer people scattered all over the place Hannah would be away with the family, they visited relatives interstate and generally had a fine time staying in caravan parks, and such on the way there and back.

Julie got to visit relatives but only at Easter and occasionally at Christmas, she wasn't interested in her wider family connections, her mum took her on day trips and shopping, then occasionally they would go off somewhere for a holiday, a week here or two here or there. Holidays weren't a big thing,

until I got to high school and then with a bigger bunch of kids the comparisons on where they went was very different.

Me on the other hand I got to see Aunt Ellie, we usually hung out for a week or so. Mum's sister Ellie is a fabulous person, very active, loved taking me to plays, music things, kids stuff, shopping. She wasn't married nor had any kids, she had a lovely house with the greenest backyard I think I have ever seen.

You could sit there for ages in her outdoor setting and just be, it was like this mini Jungle, not very big but crammed with plants, hanging baskets and who knows what, it was all in there. The ground was terracotta pavers with slightly raised edges where there was a garden bed around the whole yard.

To the right was her garage, well it was more of a shed with gardening stuff crammed into it and a bike she would sometimes ride in the warmer months. Her car was left outside, in front of the 'shed' she had a guy build a carport there, she said that was better than keeping it in the shed.

Her house had double french doors at the back, one creaked as you opened it. Opening the doors meant the indoors and outdoors could say hello to each other. We could sit there and chat for ages. She spoiled me, she didn't have the other nieces and nephews visit, but I didn't really figure that out until much later. She always acted as if I was an adult and would ask adult questions, make adult statements and so on. I think my vocabulary grew just by being around her.

She had a wicked laugh did Ellie, she told me from fairly early on 'Drop the Auntie bit, just call me Ellie.' Mum said I should keep up the Auntie bit. She was strong as an ox too. I told her about things like the headlock I did on that boy and dad talking to Travis, she giggled at that, she said 'Yep I can see him doing that!' She sat back in her chair and shook her head. 'Yep and I reckon your dad would sort him out too and Tavis's old man if he dropped in to say a few words. Heck of a nice guy your dad, but gees I wouldn't want to cross him!'

A week with Ellie was usually jam packed with things, we would get on a tram and go places, the museum, the art gallery and a few small private art galleries that had some weird stuff going on. Lunch at the Coles cafeteria was a hoot, but so was high tea in some little arcade. The city certainly had a heartbeat, people bustling left, right and centre all seeming to need to go somewhere in a hurry.

One time I went home with a new haircut, something I excitedly asked for on a whim, Mum was a bit surprised but liked it, Ellie just went with the flow. I usually got just a trim of the length, but

this was shorter. The kids at school didn't seem to notice, Hannah did, but that was about it. After the school holidays lots of kids had 'new hair'.

Ellie pointed out one time where she worked, when I got older, about 14 I think, she took me there to show me what it was like. It was very swish, a fascinating place of people quietly getting on with what they did, they were a law firm and some form of consultancy. Fifth floor of this lovely building in the city that had all sorts of amazing old details in the Architecture.

Her office looked out the front onto the street, a double line of trams punctuating the streetscape and the tops of the trees, in the autumn it would be gorgeous gold and yellow colours out there. I was like, wow the view above the trees, I was used to looking up and here I was looking down.

Wow I got off track there, one minute I was talking about climbing trees and then here we are I'm chatting about Ellie and holidays. And something about that had something to do with me being interested in self defence? Not sure why, Tomboy stuff, watching people, learning new things. Funny, those things I did on my own didn't need words, just observing and thinking.

It was Gail time again, I told her what I just told you, it meant she was able to keep up because I realised, as she had pointed out, that I jumped about and left out bits I forgot to tell her. This time I told her that stuff. She was pleased with that and now we got into what I thought was the real part of the chat.

I was always intrigued by nature and noted how it could be so sweet and nice and bitter and harsh. Like the yard at the side of the old house, and it could change just as abruptly, green one minute and then you cross a fence line and 'bam', dreary grey and harsh.

People could also be like that, bitter and harsh. At Uni I found mostly nice people to hang around with. Julie was at Uni too, although she was doing different subjects. We would catch up for lunch at least a couple of times in the week, chat madly about some boy/s and things that were happening.

Julie joined in on some of the self defence sessions, she had done Karate during the last few years of secondary school so some of it was probably a bit 'meh' for her. I think she was a bit of an inspiration to me around all that, hitting people in self defence and all that, she showed me some other moves from time to time, it was all good.

On the train especially I would think about what I might do if some idiot started a ruckus, what I might say, and or do. I would pick out a bunch of teens who got on the train, figure out which one was the 'leader' there's always a leader type... the rest would follow, and then figure out what might be said, or if they were going to be nasty from the beginning what I might do, mess with them verbally or simply disrupt them physically.... BANG! I would twitch as if I had made some move to block a punch or whack them in the head. I used to do that, actually I still do, a bit of a boy scout being prepared and all that.

It was a busy time at Uni, and looking back it was the best of times. You could always find a cosy spot in the library if you needed to focus, or simply escape for a while. A few times I fell asleep, there were these comfy couches and bingo I would be worn out or my brain would be, and bang off to sleep. One of the Librarians was a super happy soul who would gently wake me and smile. She would say, 'Hey sweetie, the Library is for study...' She had the sweetest smile, so gentle and caring.

One of the other Librarians was more abrupt and if he was on duty I knew not to fall asleep, I only fell asleep once when he was on duty, never again... he was so rude. Jolted my leg with his hand, I woke up with a start and he gave me this vile lecture about not falling asleep in the Library! He was not happy, neither was I after that. He was yelling at me, well the tone of voice was, he was quiet but yelling if that makes sense.

Anyway, there was a fantastic spot out the back end of the library, amongst a bunch of smaller interview or study type rooms where people could get together in small groups to discuss things, my spot was almost in a corner of the building and the view out the big broad windows took in a small grassy area with a big green tree, it was always green. Then it was all bordered by a neatly kept garden of native shrubs. It was all so serene.

If Julie hadn't seen me for a bit she would wander by and say 'Ah, there you are...' She would ask if I was 'good', that was a no brainer, I think I was always good, except for that grumpy time of the month that girls get, for me it was usually not a big deal, I know other girls got that quite badly.

Julie and I were quite similar in a way, our conversations could jump from one thing to another and it didn't bother us much, I think we were used to each other. Hannah on the other hand would just go silent and listen to us change from one thing to another, she suggested we were a bit like some twin sisters.

Sometimes we would go into one of the study rooms and chat if there were others about. They would get annoyed if you chatted in the library. For one whole semester we both had no subjects on

Wednesday afternoons after one pm and there we would be in the library, some study was done but it was punctuated by chatting. We never caught up for lunch on those Wednesdays, it was just the way things went.

Sometimes it was about what we had learnt and I picked up a few things about Julie's subject and she learnt some stuff about my subjects. Sometimes that meant that we asked questions about the other person's subject and that caused the other person to ask more questions in class to clarify things, so it was kind of useful.

Julie said one day that she would think about how I would be wanting to know about her subject and what questions I might ask, and how that caused her to sometimes pay more attention. That way she would remember the details better to be able to explain things to me.

We were always surrounded by the garden outside and we mostly ignored others who came into the library and whatever they were doing. Sometimes we would sit opposite each other but sometimes if we were both in the zone we sat side by side gazing out the window both in our own little world there would be periods of silence. As we watched the little things going on out in the garden, small birds flitting about, traffic in the carpark off in the distance.

Apart from the gardeners, there never seemed to be anyone who walked into that garden area, I did a couple of times just for the hell of it. From outside I wondered what I looked like from this viewpoint, looking in. Did I look studious, serious, relaxed, frazzled, attentive, challenged or what? I noticed one thing: the bees certainly loved the native plants when they were in flower.

One time I was outside and Julie was inside. She had come to catch up with me, but she didn't see me standing outside. I waved gently at first, then more vigorously, but she started to wander off. I had to jump up and down and wave my arms wildly about for her to finally see me. It was rather funny, as there were people in one of the study rooms amused at my antics jumping about.

Anyway I think my interest in words was probably the thing that got me to Uni. I once heard one of the lecturers in one of my first year subjects say 'Language, it's really the only thing that sets us apart from other animals.' I thought about that a lot and wanted to be able to have some smart-alec high level academic remark that would provide an opposing view, one that could be substantiated and be at least half true, but that never happened, I did come to terms with that statement mind you and so my interest in words, the notion of being loquacious was rather nice I thought.

It led me to exploring influence and how people thought about things. It was the simple things, like 'Don't think about the colour red right now.' You can't help it, and then on to other things like I mentioned earlier with self defence, using language to get out of 'challenging situations'.

I watched a documentary once on Psychopaths, this one guy was watching a group of people walking down a street on a TV screen, he was asked to spot potential victims. The way he was able to point out various people who were basically feeble enough to be influenced to do whatever he wanted was alarming.

They then went on to explore how he would engage people to get their attention, he could charm the back legs off a chair that fella. And the way he could 'schmooze' people with a disarming chat. He said if he had to get more aggressive with his language he would leave that person and find easier prey. Chilling I thought, prey.

After a bunch of self defence lessons the trainer noted my language skill and asked me to explain to the group how I was able to confuse people verbally and get them to think of something else and that way change their intent. It was kind of fun. I did worry that some people might want to try and use it against me out in the real world. I wondered if any psychopath types were in the class learning more ways to physically and mentally tackle people. Thankfully nothing happened, they all turned out to be nice people.

I passed most of my subjects okay, Julie did better, the occasional high distinction. I got one of those but much later in the course. Mum was in awe of me being at Uni, to dad, well he was just proud, he would say 'Whatever you end up doing after all the study I'm sure you will lead a very special and fruitful life.' He also said he didn't care much about what I did afterwards, married, had kids, get a job, or not, he just wanted me to be happy. I wanted that too.

Gail, I noted, was taking more notes than usual, it was no time and then our catch up was over, I asked about what she thought, she suggested I was indeed ADHD but without a real test to prove it that didn't mean much and nothing to worry about, I would just get distracted easily at times and change the subject. I liked chatting to her, she listened so well.

I was out the door soon after, somehow feeling a little 'lifted' by the experience. At the end of each catch up Gail would have some little quip, a quote or some such that would be like a full stop on the catch up. I rarely remembered what she said in any detail, but usually a positive statement or quote. It was nice, the trip home would then be buoyed by her words of encouragement, more so in the warmer months.

Sometimes after our catch up I had to watch carefully when on the train, my mind would wander and I would forget to get off the train at my station. Totally distracted about what had been said, in my own little world. Only did it twice, a nuisance, the first time I went two stations over before I realised, I had to wait half an hour before the next train came going back the other way.

Chapter Eight

I told Gail at our next catch up, that I thought about what I would be talking about next, on my way home on the train. And yep it was Ellie and what she thought.

Ellie had all sorts of ideas about what a 'young lady' could do. She would point out things like women who had got into high level jobs. One time I visited she had a collection of newspaper, magazine and journal articles about women who had done well and progressed in their field. I was most impressed. Something I had said at our previous catch up caused her to collect the articles.

I was also impressed with Hannah, she didn't do Uni but got a job in an office sorting mail to begin with, then occasionally doing typing when one of the others in the typing pool was away, or if they had extra typing to do. The company gave her time off to do some night classes, someone noted she had aspirational goals and helped her out. Mum said she was lucky to have someone pick up on that and give her a hand to do more.

She was always very diligent and put in a top effort for most things. In the end she was the supervisor of the typing pool, which changed as computers came in. She was quick to pick up on technology and was good at encouraging the 'girls' to learn the computer bits inside and out.

She said the last thing she wanted was a bunch of feeble 'Goils' flipping their hair about saying 'Oh I don't know much about computers.' and then call some dopey hero guy from the tech department to come and change the toner cartridge on the printer, or plug in a cable which had fallen out.

Her manager included her in any other professional development things that came up, she turned out to be good at leadership, she could show people about the company, talk to groups, supervise and train the staff and be loved by all, she was a great kid, actually she still is a great person, I love it when we catch up, she has SO many stories to tell us.

The place she worked at got taken over by a big firm called Fletchley and Green, she was worried there would be a lot of bad changes, but she was lucky and not much happened in the reshuffle, except she got a higher position, people loved her practicality and the way she could get things done.

People knew that if they needed someone to get things done Julie was it. I reckon she's got a bit of ADHD as well, and can jump from one thing to another to get things done. Nothing for her to be on her hands and knees chasing a cable that had fallen out, or figuring out where something on the copier had gone wrong.

Ellie liked hearing about my friends and what they were up to, she said Fletchley and Green were a big business with a solid reputation, which was good to hear. She also said her company, a long standing family business, were part of a takeover as well, by another big end of town group called Underwoods. They were to become a subsidiary, that didn't go as smoothly as everyone wanted but it happened. Ellie I imagined was a bit like Julie, someone who could get things done and a fantastic person to be around. I sometimes wondered what she would have been like if you treated her wrong?

Anyway, I think Ellie is one of my great role models, in later years I could catch up and chat about my own career, she had lots of information to share, the sorts of things you didn't learn at Uni but things that were very practical, types of people to avoid, wow that was an eye opener! Then things that could wreck your career, like hanging out with the wrong sorts of people or getting into useless gossip and not achieving goals.

Ellie was also fascinating as she lived alone in a three bedroom house, she said it was a bargain at the time, interest rates were low, and she had her eye on the resale value of the house, a 'smart cookie' Mum would say. Having the room and the smarts meant that she became something of a support person and she created a safe haven for girls at work, even married ones who were being abused one way or another or just needed some time out.

They knew they could rock up at any time of the day or night and have a place to be, safe from some idiot they loved at one point and I don't mean just guys. Ellie was calm and collected, gave them some space, respite if you like, and access to information that was hard to come by back in those days. She managed to keep her address details tightly held in case some idiot partner dropped in to catch up with his or her 'bride'.

Ellie developed a group of people, other women who she could send people onto if things go a 'bit tricky' as she would say. She never ended up in any harm, but there were sometimes things said

by guys who knew what she did, but didn't like a 'strong woman' getting in their way. She told me once, 'The more I hear that, the stronger I become and the more determined I am to do more of what's right for other women.'

This one time I was over there hanging out having a few laughs with an annual visit, I was still in Uni on term break. I think it was the end of second, or the start of third year and we walked from her place to the corner shop down the road to get some things and some guy pulled up near the shop. He didn't know her address but had an idea of where she lived.

He was really angry, and wanted to know where his wife was, well she wasn't at Ellie's place and the more she said that, the more riled he became. He lunged forward to grab her and I was onto him like a shot, kicked out one of his legs and he was up again, his adrenaline must have been so high. He took a shot at punching me only to find his nose pointing at the concrete path.

I had a habit of saying 'Not today buddy, and NOT tomorrow either!' This was usually followed by me giving them a cracked rib or something else to seriously think about. Ellie said I went off with a bang and made sure he never bothered us again. The guy was on the ground, in this case, he got a coked thigh, a bruised leg and a bloody nose. And let's just say a 'rattled disposition'. I bounced to my feet and stood there looking, he said 'I will get you for this bitch!' I then made sure he didn't say anything more. His dental bill would have been a bit steep I think, some of his dribble ended up on my shoe, eww.

His wallet, how shall I say, it seemed to 'fall' out of his pocket. I picked it up and checked out his name and address on his licence. Then took out twenty dollars and threw the wallet back at him. I then said, 'I have your address and name, I can and will make things exceptionally bad for you if there is any retaliation from today, I will come and make really bad things happen. I feel sure you understand that I mean business and, oh what the feck, you get the message now piss off.'

We walked off and Ellie slowly and quietly said 'I want to do the self defence stuff you've been doing, man o man that was AWESOME.' After the shop we carefully walked out the door and saw the guy limp into his car, there was some blood on the footpath from his nose. Never heard from him again. I told Ellie it takes quite a while and some in depth sparring to get to that level of close quarter combat.

Ellie couldn't help but shake her head in disbelief and mentioned it to Mum on the phone. Mum laughed a bit and said words to the effect 'Yep that's Linda for ya!' I said to Ellie, 'There is a time for being soft and the opposite is also true.'

She did do some self defence stuff, I got to chat to her about it on occasional visits. I ended up not going to her place for a whole week at a time as I got older, but a couple of weekends throughout the year was always good.

One time I took Mum and we went to see a show, I think it was 'Singing in the Rain'. I wasn't impressed much but the three of us had a fine time. The next day a walk through the botanical gardens. Wow I was so impressed by the gardens, the dappled light, the various walks, so beautiful.

I remember Ellie met one of her work buddies by chance, Alan. Nice guy, Ellie was a bit taken aback, she said he was a workaholic, and so she was very surprised to see him in the park. It turned out he didn't live far from the park a few blocks away. The man must have been loaded to live near the gardens like that. Turns out he was one of the Directors of the company. I remember mum said he had impeccable manners but you had to watch people like that.

It was funny the three of us catching up, Mum had a few drinks and was so relaxed, she and Ellie would spend ages chatting about the old days and things they got up to. I would sit back and listen to their stories, sometimes rather boring accounts about 'old Mrs Jenkins and her little dog', and then other times the stories involved what mum did before she got married. I think she had too many boyfriends just between you and me, but Ellie said mum was a most capable girl, and could 'flirt with the best of them.' They giggled like school girls sometimes.

I think sisters have a special bond, you know, like twins at times, who develop their own language and sometimes finish each other's sentences.

Mum would say 'Oh I envy Ellie, she has had such an interesting life and career.' Then I would hear Ellie say, 'God I envy your mum, such a simple life, good family and so on, just so easy.' I would smile to myself, and tell them each had envied the other so much.

Dad on the other hand he could catch up with his brother sometimes and they barely said a word, the usual pleasantries, a bit about work, some car issue, the state of play in politics, but not much, and then periods of silence as they sipped beer or a few wines. If we had a family get together the guys would stand around the barbeque and the women would be in the kitchen. I could flit between the two and compare how each group chatted, laid back guy chat and vibrant women talk, punctuated with hushed talk, almost whispering and then a gasp or two at what had just been said.

Me, I was just fascinated by it all, somewhere between the indoor vibrancy and the outdoor beer sipping I could just be.

One of my cousins, younger than me, Alex, was playing in the yard waiting for lunch. I noticed he was a bit bored and had headed over to the fence under the big tree and looked into the triangular yard. He looked up at the tree and then down into the yard. I wandered over, he said how come this bit is fenced off? I casually said, 'Oh that's to keep the witches out, they come over occasionally and dance about under the moonlight and so the wire fence is there.' He stood and thought about that. I casually walked away.

Later while having lunch he asked dad how the witches got into the yard, as it was all fenced off, there was no gate for them to get in. Dad looked over to the yard and said, without a blink, 'Oh they bring a little ladder, very respectful those witches, you barely know they have even been there sometimes.'

Alex looked puzzled and said 'But a ladder only goes up? How would they get down to the other side?' Dad said, 'Oh they have a climbing ladder, it's a timber one and it fits together at the top it comes in like three pieces, they put one bit over the fence then the other bit up the outside and a top bit sits on top and it holds the other two bits together.'

Dad went back to sipping his beer, he gave me a wink and sipped some more. I thought the old bugger could make up stories just like me. Later on I realised he used to be able to do that if he was reading me a story as a kid and I didn't want to hear any of the stories in books we had, we had read all those. He would make up some fanciful yarn about a couple of characters doing all manner of things. Sometimes he could create a story out of a few characters and scenes from some of the other books and weld them together to create something new.

Mum and Alex's mum stopped chatting at that point, they heard the word witches and were a bit dumbstruck. Then when dad answered about the ladders and such they went back to chatting as if nothing had happened, barely a raised eyebrow.

As they left in their car that day I could hear Alex's mum ask him, 'Alex, what made you think there are witches that use the yard here?' They drove off slowly, Alex looking out the window at us as we waved goodbye. I wondered what he said and what his mum thought. She knew through chatting to Mum that 'I was a creative soul.' I smiled, and said, 'A fine time was had by all...' Then dad said with a big sigh 'Ah yes, so true, a fine time was had by all...'

Then Mum said 'Which, Witch is which?' I added 'Which Witch is Who?' nothing was added, I suspect she thought about that too much. Some red wine blurred her brain with a delay in thinking and I'm not sure if what I had said made any sense. She just quietly slowly said 'Yeah...'

Family catch ups always seemed to have an obligatory catch up afterwards, Dad filling in about what he had learnt from his Brother and then Mum would share what she had learnt from Alex's Mum. Then there would be a quiet chat about how Alex was going, I probably wasn't meant to hear that he had been a bit naughty at school etc. But I had good hearing and knew just where to stand to hear them chat quietly in the lounge room from a hidden position in the hallway.

I usually didn't sleep easily after a family catch up, even a small one like this. My mind would go over the details, what the food was like, who said what, what it may have meant etc, and then in this case I wondered about what Alex thought about witches and such.

I still love the old house, it holds special memories, Mum, dad and I. Mum would often mow the grass, she said she had more time than Dad did and with just the three of us to look after she had a fairly cruisey time of things, she said so herself. It was nothing for me to come home from school to see Mum finishing off the last bit of the mowing.

Trimming the edges was out for her, she thought it was too tedious, I think that like me she was a bit antsy pantsy and wanted simple things to go fast and then change to another thing, she left that for dad. In the summer when it was still light out after dinner he would go out and do the edges and such.

Mum said at work she liked the simple quick jobs, sorting the bookkeeping for a smaller company and then moved on to something else, all still numbers but someone else's numbers.

But, that all changed, that happens, and then in true form the feelings associated with the change passes, well mostly they do, it can take a while but, you know they change, they fade a bit.

Thankfully I was old enough to be able to handle their passing due to a bad car accident. I liked the fact, strange as it seems, that they both died together, hopefully it was a quick passing.

Chapter Nine

I dropped by sometimes, after the sale of the old place. You know I could stand here and look at that house for hours on end I guess, except I got the urge to move on I would go away and come back,

take a look at the triangular yard, think about the 'Witches' climbing the fence and mum mowing the grass.

I would have loved to find some kids' bike and take a ride around town, then climb the lower trees at the park. Nice idea but it never happened. Lots of other things happened but hey, here I was, just thinking about these few things. I never stayed long, I thought the new owners would spot that strange girl hanging out the front again.

Gail said I was in fine shape mentally, naturally I liked that. I think my catch ups with Gail were more about getting a different point of view somehow, so much had happened and here I was without my parents, Just Ellie, really. Oh there are other relatives etc, sure they were there, but not the same as Ellie. We still catch up and chat.

Gail suggested I might explore grieving and how others handle it and how they come to terms with their loss. There were interviews online I could watch. I thought it was interesting that I never told her about my parents passing, nor did she ask anything about that, oh she knew, I told her in the first session, and that I think I wanted to explore how I have a chunk of my life missing.

She did suggest that I might want to have some more catchups to explore my secondary schooling and why I jumped from one thing to another and not mention anything much about it. I guess I had other things on my mind.

I got some 'closure' and the guys at work have certainly been more at ease around me, I think it was something to do with me crying less, especially under pressure, Old Ellie said it was natural to do that and it would pass, she said 'Hang in there kid! You've got his!' She was spot on as usual. It was often punctuated with a long hug, the sort that really means something and I don't know, the universe seems to decide on how long that hug should last for.

Hannah and Julie were good about it all too, and dropped in occasionally at home. The old house sold, I was enjoying city life too much to move back to the country, the clean out took a while. Dad's brother was so good, as was Ellie, they hauled away useless stuff to the local tip and helped with the final yard clean up and sales process. We had plenty of reminiscing in between sorting and cleaning up, lots of laughs and a few tears to boot.

It took some time to do, getting through all the stuff, trips to the tip etc, a couple of weekends and a few days one long weekend. One day I was up at the general store getting some things for lunch

and caught up with one of the boys I hung out with on the bikes, we chatted for a bit and hooked up on social media. He's married with two boys, and still lives locally.

I only kept a few little mementos, relatives took most of the family photos and other things that were more family heirlooms, I got a few small things and that's fine, I'm quite happy to not have too much stuff.

A few things I have had framed, small items that remind me of mum and dad, an old watch, a spoon dad won as an award at work, I remember him saying what a weird award, but it was engraved and all that, so it was kind of special, then a small black and white photo of the two of them on their honeymoon. Just some memories I like to keep.

The Framer put a plaque in it with their names, dates etc. it all turned out kind of nice. Ellie liked it, she said it was a fitting tribute to them.

Anyway here I am ready to take on whatever happens next, and as they say 'If you carry joy in your heart, you can heal any moment.' That's nice and so far it seems to be legit.