

Ryno's Way.....

1. Childhood.....What a fuck up.

I was born in August 1973 in Subiaco, WA. My first memory is a typically weird one..... I remember walking down a concrete path on a hot day with a lady I knew as Auntie Bet. She wasn't my Auntie but I think she was one of those family friends that kids refer to as Auntie or Uncle, something I find to be pretty weird actually!

Anyway as we were walking along Auntie Bet suddenly coughed and choked before she announced to me that she had swallowed a fly..... At the time I thought that was the weirdest shit I had ever heard! Why the fuck would you swallow a fly?? I mean dirt ok but a fly???

We left WA when I was four so this was obviously a pretty big deal to me at the time....

My next recollection is living in a weatherboard place in Windsor St, Glenorchy Tasmania that backed on to Cosgrove High School. From what I gather we had left W.A. in a hurry and a friend of my Nan's had rented us the house. I remember it being pretty shit, steel mesh fences, broken fence palings and rusty corrugated iron roof. I mainly remember sitting at the kitchen table with Mum one morning and watching a big fat black rat scamper across the floor from under the oven. Lovely.

About that time though I started to become aware that something was wrong with my family. I started to feel the tension and see the difficulties between my Mum and Dad. I can't remember seeing the violence or fights in that house but it's definitely the place that my inner dread started to be noticeable.

Strangely though my toughest memory from this time was when my Dad shaved off his moustache. He didn't look like my Dad anymore and I balled my eyes out. It's weird that my kids at 15 and 17 still hate it when I shave or shorten the beard....I guess it's a security blanket type of thing.

After starting School at St. Therese's Moonah we moved to our house in Meredith St, Newtown. The house was at the end of a downhill dead end street which was fantastic for street long time trials or "longest skid" competitions between my brother and I on our trusty MX bike. Mr and Mrs Salt lived next door and they were really nice to my brother and I. I still remember with great delight the time that my brother braked way too late on one of our aforementioned time trials and slammed headlong into the Salts brick and concrete front fence. It was like slow motion as I watched him sail over the fence and land face first onto the beautifully manicured lawn before skidding into the garden. It was fucking brilliant!!!!

My brother and I have always had a very tumultuous relationship and it was about now that it all started which is probably not unusual for young fellas of a young age. We had many confrontations such as my brother chasing me with the garden fork and trying to kill me. Fortunately he tripped and shoved the fork through his own foot. Right through. I distinctly remember pouring blood out of his little yellow gumboot before we took off to the hospital. We got fish and chips for dinner that night!!! It was awesome!

Another time I was teasing him about my football team (Glenorchy) beating his football team (Hobart). He lost his shit, picked up the solid metal sprinkler and ran towards me. I turned and took off towards the rear of the back yard. I later woke up lying on the grass, my head covered in blood.

It later became apparent that he had pegged the heavy sprinkler into the back of my head and knocked me out cold. He then did the right and proper thing and promptly ran away.

Our neighbours over the back always had a stack of kids that were a bit older than us. They also had a huge Walnut tree and there were many walnut throwing fights where we were always outnumbered. As I recall during one of these fights we ran low on walnuts so my brother pinged a rock at our back fence enemies....subsequently a rock was pinged back and I was hit in the head earning me another scar.

It wasn't always us attacking each other though.....I recall watching as stuck a screwdriver into a power point in the garage. It blew him a few meters backwards and all his hair was standing on end.....he reminded me of Beaker from the Muppets.

Occasionally we actually got on well. As with most Aussie kids playing cricket was a favourite activity. We played in the skinny driveway to the side of the house. Straight drives were best as it was the only real opening, square cuts went straight into the house which was fine but hook shots landed you in the market garden next door. There were two issues with this....firstly it was six and out but even worse was that the old European resident (referred to as the Wog) that owned the joint was one seriously scary old bastard!!! If he ever saw us amongst his cabbages he would come racing out with a stick and screaming at us in some language that we couldn't understand but we knew he wasn't wishing us any pleasantries!!!

Just while we are discussing Meredith Street I have vivid memories of my unabashed joy at cooking cheese slices on the sun heated roof of my Dad's much loved green Valiant sedan. It was fantastic until he came out and found me sitting on the roof surrounded by melted cheese. A solid flogging was delivered.

Sadly as all these shenanigans were taking place my Mum and Dad's relationship was getting far worse. My Dad was becoming violent to and in front of me.

My Mum was, by all accounts, a beautiful soul. She was a nurse and at this point in time was working as a mobile carer for the Hobart District Nursing Service. She would drop us to school each day and we would either walk home or a friend of hers would pick us up. My Mum would cook us Toad in the Hole (which we thought was fantastic) and lamb chops in the upright griller. I loved her. We were very poor but I didn't really know until I was rudely awakened to the fact during a game of four square. I arrived proudly wearing my brand spanking new Trax sneakers with black nylon uppers, plastic silver sole, two red stripes and best of all.....Velcro laces!!! I had never ever had a new pair of shoes and I was dead set chuffed!!! As soon as I arrived I casually mentioned to one of the girls that she ought to check out my fabulous new sneakers..... Unfortunately I didn't get the response I was expecting. Immediately the term Trax crap sprang from her mouth as she pointed at my apparently not so fabulous new sneakers. A mob soon gathered to join the public humiliation session and I was known as referred to as Trax crap for a few days after that.

My Dad on the other hand seemed to do bugger all. I remember him lying on the day bed in the lounge room most days whilst Mum was at work. I also remember him having a vinyl book keeper's bag and some of the scrolling stands that show the betting odds. I'm still not a gambler so I don't know all the details or terminology but he was obviously at that time a bookie. From what I gathered from him and Mum fighting about money he wasn't a very good bookie.

My first direct memory of the violence of my father was hearing him and Mum having a screaming match one night. It certainly wasn't the first one I had heard but I think it was the first time I had

ever come out of my room during one. In the small hallway Dad had Mum pinned against the wall and was yelling into her face. Dad was 6 foot or so and Mum was about 5'2" but they were both 6 foot at that moment with Mum's feet well off the floor. I ran to them and pushed between them only to receive a cracking back hander from Dad which sent me flying back up the hall. I don't remember what happened then but it felt like the world had just changed.

After that I'm not sure if it was because I now knew what was happening or if it became more frequent but I was often in the middle of these physical altercations. Dad would occasionally stop when he saw me but not always. Mum would cuddle me and escort me back to my room.

I can't actually remember my dad being drunk when I was young but I gather that even then booze was the major issue and it was growing all the time.

During this period I had adventures with him that were amazing. We went on road trips in his green Valiant which we would sleep in after going fishing at the beach. Dad would sit there with his light blue terry towelling hat and a can of beer while he told us repeatedly, "No it isn't a bite it's the current dragging your sinker" before having to cast out again as I had to check my baitagain. We walked around the shore and found a dog skeleton which I thought was brilliant but wasn't allowed to keep. He did however let me keep a piece of stone from an old bridge on the East Coast of Tassie.

I loved my Dad so much and I have some great memories with him. Unfortunately I have had to uncover them in my mind as they were buried by all the cruel and nasty shit he did as well.

A strange example was one night when he woke me (possibly us) up to clean up our legos. I picked them up, put them in the two lego buckets and went to take them to our room. He then coldly and menacingly said to put them back down before he kicked them both back over. Just as coldly he told me to pick them all up again which I did before he again kicked them both over. This happened many times and I was scared shitless the entire time. I copped many a kicking from Dad but for whatever reason this is the thing that stands out as the time when I started hating him.

Things did not improve until I was 7 years old. I got home and Dad sat me down to tell me that he was going away. It turns out that Mum had given him the ultimatum that unless he stopped drinking he could not live with us. He was crying and hugged me saying that he would come back once he had sorted himself out. I was fucking heartbroken. Just like that he was gone and I didn't speak to Dad again for a couple of years.

It was just Mum, my brother and I then. My Nan and Pop (Dad's parents) came around and Pop who was a carpenter built a room at the back of the house for me. I loved it after sharing bunk beds with David who used to bounce on the top bunk just to shit me. He fell off while he was doing it once which was just brilliant!!!!

Mum was working hard at this point as a full time working Mum. We were supposed to go my Granma's (Mum's Mum) after School each afternoon until Mum had finished work. In all honesty I have very few memories of Granma before this which I'm pretty sure is as a result of her firmly hating my Dad and us not going there much.

Granma and I never got on. I look very much like my Dad and her favourite thing to say to me was that I was just like my Father. She didn't mean it as a compliment.

My brother cottoned on to how to get on in our situation very early, he said what he should say, did what looked great and sucked up to Granma deluxe. I don't feel any ill will to him about this, if I had been smarter and more savvy I would have done the same thing I guess.

Just about every afternoon Granma and I would have a drama. Her favourite punishment was to hold my head under the bath tap so I couldn't breathe. Sort of water boarding for kids.

After a while it became apparent that this couldn't continue so my brother would go to Granma's after school and I would go home by myself. This suited me just fine and I thought the term latch key kid was kind of a badge of honour.

Now I'm not pretending I was an angelic child by any means but I don't remember doing anything too bad up until this time. I do however distinctly remember my beautiful, caring, loving mother giving me a hiding to remember around this time.....I was neatly trapped in the corner of the laundry at Meredith Street with Mum swinging the cane lustily whilst screaming like a Banshee, blood oozing from the cuts on my legs as she did so. I have no idea what I had done but by Christ it sent her over the edge!!! This and having multiple wooden spoons broken on my arse leads me to believe that even as a young un I was a little bit difficult!

One December day in 1982 Mum had to go to a conference in Launceston so she had a co-worker in the car as she dropped us off in the St Therese's Car park. I got out and she said, "Come and give me a kiss"! I said Nah and ran off.

After school that night I was waiting at home for Mum to get home after work as usual. The plastic soldiers were in full formation and I was enjoying the standard sandwiches and thick Milo mix. Mum normally got home a bit after five but by 6.30ish I was feeling a bit nervous.

There was a knock at the door which I answered. Standing there was a Policeman who seemed huge. He asked if my Mum was home (weird question in hindsight) and I told him no but she would be soon. He then told me that Mum had been in a car accident and was there anyone else that he could speak to.

Now Mum had backed into the neighbours garbage bin a few weeks ago and I had witnessed the event. That to me was a car accident so I wasn't too worried about the whole thing really.

I said to the Policeman we could go see my Granma. He asked me the address which I didn't know. He then gave me a bollocking about how I should know my Grandmothers address. I didn't tell him that I didn't even know my own address!! We then got in his car which I thought was very cool and I directed him to Granma's place. When we got there he spoke to Granma.

It was then that I realised that something very bad had happened.

Nanma immediately turned to David and hugged him whilst they both burst into tears. This suddenly didn't seem like some bin related incident. We then went straight to my Uncle and Aunties place (my Uncle was Mum's brother). I really didn't know them that well and we only ever saw them on special occasions. They hated Dad too. Their house seemed huge and really nice and they had just had their first baby, Kate.

I wasn't sure what was happening but there was a feeling of shock and Granma was still crying. After a while we went back to our house and got some stuff before going back to Granma's place to stay the night.

The next night we all sat down to watch the news. Then, on the screen was Mum's orange Cortina.....or at least it looked like it. The car we had been in the previous day was now a smashed turned inside out mess of a thing with fluid all over the place and Cop cars all around it. I remember the words Critical and Clearys Gates being said by the News presenter. I turned around to see my

Auntie and Granma in tears with their hands to their faces and my Uncle staring ashen faced at the screen. They then went and spoke amongst themselves.

My Uncle came and spoke to me saying that Mum was in the hospital and everything was going to be ok. I asked when we could go and see her but he said it wasn't a good idea right now.

Then I went back to School. I was in year three at the time and Mrs. McCarthy was my teacher and I thought she was brilliant. When I arrived she gave me a hug (unusual) and had tears in her eyes. I then got down to work.

The days rolled on and I guess things started to feel a little less dramatic. So what Mum was in hospital! Granma was being nice to me, everyone else seemed to be extra nice to me and my Uncle had told me Mum was going to be fine. Things were pretty good! That week Mum's Work Christmas party was on and for some reason my brother, Nanma and I were going. This had never happened before. When we got there we were the dead set stars of the show, the boss nurse got up and introduced us and then we got more presents from people we didn't know than we usually got from the people we did on Christmas Day!!! I got a remotely controlled robotic style arm/crane thing called Armatron.....It absolutely blew my mind!!!! Then we ate masses of food, had stacks of soft drink and everyone asked us how we were and patted my head. What a brilliant afternoon!!

The next day I was in my room when Granma came in with my brother. She said she needed to talk to us and we all sat on the bed. She then started crying and my brother started crying. I didn't cry because everything was going to be fine and I had an Armatron.

Granma told us Mum wasn't going to come home. Mum was never going to come home again. Mum was going to die.

One of my best mate's Dad had died unexpectedly a few months earlier. Nick's Dad was an awesome guy with a big beard and I used to often stay at their place. One day he went to work and was killed by a falling load on the wharf. That was it.....

Mum was going to die. What did that really mean? Why had I been told that she was going to be fine? What was going on??! I then cried hard but I didn't really get it.

That night we went to stay at my Auntie Audrey's (Dad's sister) place. This was pretty weird in itself as Granma didn't like them either as they were related to Dad. My brother and I went to the spare room and slept in the bunks, my brother up top as usual.

During the night my brother rolled off the top bunk and crashed to the floor. I woke up to him screaming his tits off and apparently he had put his teeth through his lip, there was heaps of blood. I just wished I had seen him fall off as the last time was excellent.

In the morning Auntie Audrey came and got us up. She sat us down and told us that Mum had died overnight. She was crying, Nan was crying, my brother was crying.....I didn't get it. The world felt like slow motion and I didn't cry.

Then Auntie Audrey told me that Dad was on the phone and wanted to talk to me. I hadn't spoken to Dad since he left two years ago. I said hello and it was him. He was crying. He told me that everything was going to be ok and he would be back when he sorted himself out. We didn't go to school that day.

The next day we went to School. It was the last day and we didn't wear a uniform, I was there to get my stuff and clean out my desk. When I got there Mrs McCarthy burst into tears and hugged me.

She then got Nick and took us to the front of the class where she quietened everyone and told them that my Mum had died. She then said she had never had a class where one of her kids parents had died and now she had had two in the one year. She was still crying and kissed me on the head. Then I left. For the holidays.

The funeral was a few days later. We were front and centre and the Church was absolutely packed out. My Nan and Dad's family didn't sit with us. There was a coffin in front of the Altar and the St. Therese's Priest, Father North spoke and referred to my brother and I a lot. Then we walked out in a procession behind the coffin. I couldn't believe how packed the place was and how many people were crying. I didn't cry. I don't think I got it.

The next few months were awful. I remember Granma and my Uncle and Auntie arguing about what they were going to do with us. Granma eventually moved into our house and gradually started to hate me again, no more hugs, you are just like your father....etc. I think I had got too big for the tap treatment though.

This is when I started to feel truly lost.

I felt like no matter what I did with Granma she hated me. Eventually I think I started hating her back and then she really started hating me!!! After a while I got moved in to Uncles house.

My Uncle was my legal guardian. Mum had asked him if something should happen to her would he look after her children. I'm sure it rolled easily off his tongue when he said yes. My Uncle and Auntie were not prepared for this life that had been thrust upon them. My Uncle was running his own mechanic business, they had just had their first baby and life was going how it should until Mum died. Then they instantly had a nine and a seven year old, who in truth they barely knew, to deal with.

It was a disaster.

2. Can't you take him!!

There was an old garage, shed at the rear of their house which they clad out with the timber look wall coverings. I liked it, it was mine! Shower in the laundry nearby.....I didn't have to go in the house aside from to eat.

What I figured out pretty quickly was that no one actually wanted me to go inside very much. Any entry of mine to the lounge area or front of the house where the dining room or my guardian's room was situated was generally met with something similar to "Is there something you want"? My Uncle did not want to be my Dad. At all. I was his nephew and he always introduced me as such. My Auntie in truth just seemed to be confused and unsure about me and I subsequently became confused and unsure about her. On many occasions I witnessed conversations between my Uncle and my Granma regarding who would look after me..... "Can't you take him" or similar terms were pretty common. This entire time still feels very dark to me. This new world looked heaps better my old one but in truth it was worse. There was so much that I just couldn't understand... why had my guardians and Granma fought hard to keep me and my brother with their side of the family? They constantly let me know that I was just a massive pain in the ass....so why did they want us in the first place??

I wondered why I couldn't go and live with my Nan but when I brought it up I got slapped down and told that would never happen.

My Granma and Uncle were constantly reminding me that my Dad was a no good drunk and that he was the reason for our troubles.....even for Mum's death because if he had been a decent man Mum wouldn't have had to go to work. Yet each night my Granma and Guardians sat around sipping Sherry from a decanter next to them until (particularly my Granma) were slurring and had trouble getting up.

On top of that I was often told that my Dad had beaten Mum and us and what a bad man he was for doing so. The stone cold fact is that no one has ever hit me as hard and as often as my Uncle. His standard plan was to call me to stand in front of him and ask me what I had done. When I said I didn't know he would open hand crack me around the side of the head.....it wasn't a slap, the noise was a dull thump. I often saw stars after these hits. The more I spoke the more he decided that I was lying and the more he cracked me. If I didn't speak he would crack me. If I flinched he would tell me to be a man, if I didn't "show him respect" he would close his fist and hold it in front of my face whilst he berated me.

These sessions were some of the worst of my life. There was simply no win. If I told the truth I would get a hiding, if I lied I got a hiding, if I didn't say what he wanted I got a hiding. I have never felt more disempowered as I did then.

During this time I spent as much time as I could at other friends' houses often asking their parents if I could stay the night. This really pissed my Uncle off and he yelled at me saying that I had to stay there as it was my home.....Like fuck it was my home!!!

Apart from feeling safe these visits to my friends houses gave me a glimpse into what a normal family was all about. They weren't perfect but people actually had discussions with each other! They didn't just yell or get angry or point fingers as they spoke and best of all they didn't hit each other!! Sure there were some smacks delivered (it was the 80's) but no one got hit in the head or punched in the face.....even that would have been nice.

When I was 10 we started playing club hockey. I was going to play football but my Uncle had played hockey for years and we sort of fell into it. I played full back, liked it and I was pretty sporty so I did ok. When I was 12 my Uncle decided to coach us and I loved it!! For whatever reason he didn't give me a hard time and it was as close as I ever came to feeling like his son. We played really well that year and eventually we ended up playing in the grand final on the main newly astro turfed field! We were the first game of the day but there were people in the stands as we did our warm ups.....I was so freakin excited I could barely contain myself!!! Then the game was on, I played pretty well and got some "Well done mate" calls from my Uncle!

Then.....we won....and the coolest thing happened!!! My Uncle ran over and hugged me! Hugged me properly too right on the new field in front of a crowd! It was the happiest day I had had since Mum died and I felt like the world had finally changed for the better!

Unfortunately it hadn't. On the Sunday I was told to mow the lawns and got hit for not doing them properly. I never ever got a hug from my Uncle again and I never ever felt like his son again. After a few months I was moved back to Granma's as my guardians had had another baby named Michael.

I'm pretty sure that it was about now that I started acting up. I really disliked Granma and I started to behave pretty badly. Aside from the usual not cleaning my room stuff that kids do I openly refused to do as she asked, I swore at her and laughed when she hit me. When she could do no more she would call my Uncle to come down and sort me out. He would deliver a solid flogging each time.....if I hadn't already run away. I often used to take off to Lenah Valley Primary School and

distinctly remember watching my Uncle driving past slowly looking for me. I generally turned up later and received a belated kicking and a week or so of silent treatment which suited me fine.

I then started to steal. I started off stealing money from Granmas's purse when she was asleep and when I couldn't do that I would shoplift. For a while I got involved with a few dodgy kids that were stealing cars and stealing from people's houses but I soon left them. They were dickheads and were always going to get caught.

Anyway when I was 12 I was at K-Mart and saw a very cool glow in the dark skull with rubber snakes and spiders in it.....I wanted it! I kept an eye out, removed it from the package and stuffed it down my pants before walking out the front doors. About 4 steps out someone grabbed my shoulder and said, "Hand it over Son". I had been caught by store security. I was taken to one of their interview style rooms and asked a heap of questions. I was absolutely shitting myself. Then the cop arrived and gave me another serious telling off before telling me that he would be taking me home to speak to my parents. I told him that they were gone but my Granma would be there. The drive home in the cop car was only a few kilometres but it felt like a long long time. When we got there my Gran nearly died when she saw the cop. I was sent to my room and my fate was discussed in the lounge room. Eventually I was called out and the cop told me sternly that I was to be given a warning this time but next time would be very serious. Granma couldn't wait to call my Uncle to tell him the news only stopping to tell me how much trouble I was in. No shit I thought...

My Uncle arrived and I braced myself. He yelled and ranted, lot's of fist in front of the face etc.....but no hitting! I got banned from watching TV and eating with the family for 1 month. The TV bit sucked but eating in my room away from my Granma and brother teaming up on me was brilliant!!!! A few months before my brother and I had had a fight during dinner and my brother stabbed me in the shoulder with his fork....it was stuck in there without holding it. My Gran witnessed this attack and as a result.....sent me to my room. Not having to eat with them was a blessing!

Being back at Granma's sucked enough but then I got some news that tore my heart out. I was informed that I would be going to Boarding School in year 7, I would be living there for five nights a week and could come home for weekends. The boarding school was 6km from my house.

I felt a new level of abandonment and I fought the idea as hard as I could getting regular beltings for it. Even though home was shit I didn't want to be alone.

Just before I headed off to what I fully believed was going to be a new kind of Hell I had another experience with the Police....this one was a little different though. I had agreed to take my little brother and his mate, Scott to the movies in the city and we had been dropped off by Scott's Dad. We watched the movie and then headed out to the street in front of the movies to wait to be picked up. As we were standing there a group of bad looking lads came towards us and I caught eye contact with one of them....bad move. They increased their pace and came straight at me with a determined look in their eyes. We later established that there were nine of them, aged from 15 to 17. I told my brother and his mate to go inside but I don't know if they did. Right then I was grabbed by 3 of them and pinned against the glass of the theatre, the biggest of them then stepped up, said, "What did you fucking say" and punched me straight in the face....hard! My holders then let go and they all took off. I can't remember if I went down or not but my head was ringing. My brother was yelling at me and I then saw Scott's Dad striding towards me, I touched the right side of my face and it was covered in blood.....

Next thing I remember I was in the Police Station giving what I now know was a statement, the Cop was taking notes and was pretty happy with my recollection of events. He asked me if I would recognise them if I saw them and I reckoned I would.... Then we jumped in the Cop car and went hunting! This was heaps heaps cooler than my last ride with the Police!

I was enjoying this now! We were cruising the streets looking for my attackers and I was checking everyone out, still holding the blood soaked washer to my face. The stitches could wait, this was cool! Then I saw him!! The guy that punched me! He only had two of his minions with him but I remembered them as well. The Cop pulled out in front of them and grabbed them on the spot immediately putting the leader in the back of the car with me in the front. This big bad ass now turned into a snivelling piece of shit apologising for belting me, saying he thought I was someone else and begging me to not say anything. I said nothing but I was thinking fuck you dickhead, you're gone!

When I joined the Cops years later I looked him up. There was his assault charge from me. I actually caught up with him a few times while I was in Hobart uniform and he was just as I remembered him at the last.....a snivelling piece of shit.

3. Middle School.....

Year 6 ended and despite my protests I was going to boarding school. My orientation day started as I had suspected, poorly.... All new students were seated in the Church and called up by having their names called out....Elson Ryan.....Great, they had called me out backwards.

After that we headed to the boarding quarters. We were shown the big rooms packed with beds, large bathrooms with 20 sinks and 10 showers and the big dining room by the Priest in charge. All the while we were being watched by a group of unruly looking lads who would very soon be my boarding school brothers. I had a feeling that instead of being the big guy of primary school I was now firmly at the bottom of the pecking order and I was scared. This was not the last time I went from penthouse to shithouse in my life!

I then met my fellow newbies also starting year 7. Damon first, from Dover and looking as scared as I felt. Timmy, small and looking even more scared than I felt and lastly Ben who looked confident and capable. I hoped I looked like he did.

We were then introduced to our boarding master known as Sarge. He was a mid 20's guy who lived in a room within our room and was the only non-Religiously appointed boarding master. He had earned his nickname by not taking any shit from smart arse year 7 kids. Great....

Anyway school started. I felt so lonely and afraid on my first Sunday night but every other newbie did too. We then got told by a few of the year 8's that it was movie night so we followed them downstairs to the dining room. There were heaps of seats in front of the TV and behind that the head Priest had a small room open that was packed full of lollies, chips and soft drink....we had our own little tuck shop!

I have no recollection of the movie but I remember us newbies got stirred up a bit. What really struck me though was how happy everyone seemed to be! It didn't seem at all like the dismal lonely prison atmosphere that I expected....it seemed a bit like a home coming!

In the days that followed all the normal new school stuff happened. New classes, new friends, new girls, a fair bit of chest puffing from the lads and the standard pecking order rituals. It was all pretty good. Friday afternoon came around and I, like all the other boarders, was looking forward to going home. I got picked up, taken home and it was, as usual, fucking awful.

After a few weeks I realised something.....I loved boarding school!! Ok so the Priests and brothers could be a bit nasty occasionally but I was hanging out with new friends' every day and no one hit me around the head!!! This was awesome!!

I quickly became solid mates with my fellow newbies and something else very cool happened....my senior boarders (Year 8 to 12) looked after us against anyone else aside from other boarders. They told us how to get around the school, which priests and brothers to avoid and if anyone had a drama with a day student (day rats as they were occasionally known) they would often find themselves surrounded by bigger boarders and told that it was "fight one boarder, fight them all".

I had never experienced anything like this. It felt like what I thought family should feel like. I felt safe. I felt strong!

Of course as in any family it wasn't all roses. As I said above senior boarders looked after us against anyone else aside from other boarders. If you had a drama with another boarder you generally had to sort it out on your own come what may. A fair few smack downs took place generally about respect (or lack thereof) and most were well deserved. I know for certain that my only one was very well deserved. I probably got off lightly.

Physically I was an above average solidly built kid, I wasn't scared of much (what could be scarier than home) and with the backup of my boarders I started feeling pretty cocksure of myself. I started feeling like I was top of the food chain and, sadly, I started becoming a bully. I threw my weight around, belittled people and was generally a nasty bastard. I so deeply regret behaving like this, I have no excuse but all I can put it down to was that I had always felt so shit and insignificant that I wanted to be above others. I have since apologised to many of the people I bullied during this time but I'm sure I caused a lot of damage.

One of the things I regret most is the way we newbies treated another one of ours. Woodsy unfortunately arrived a few weeks into the school year after us newbies had bonded. For whatever reason us stupid 12 year olds didn't accept him and I may have been the worst. We tormented him, stirred him, ignored him and generally made him feel shit. We short sheeted him and put "itching powder" in his bed. Woodsy finally cracked and lost his shit.

Woodsy had an older brother boarder in year 10 who was about a foot taller than me. One afternoon we were on the netball courts watching the girls train (another boarder perk) when my name was yelled from behind me. I turned to notice that there were a heap of senior boarders around me and striding towards me was Woodsy's big brother. He grabbed me by the collar and pushed me backwards repeatedly until my back hit the concrete wall and I had nowhere else to go. All boarders and passers-by silently watched on including those at netball training who had stopped to watch the show. I was given the news that if I hassled Woodsy one more time a serious kicking would be delivered. I gobbled off a bit to preserve a little bit of pride but I was fully aware that I was not in charge here and that every single boarder in attendance would not interfere should I ever require that kicking. Woodsy's brother turned and walked away, I stood there looking at all the faces in the crowd looking at me in silent judgement. I felt so stupid and pathetic. I stopped picking on Woodsy then, as did all the other newbies, and he soon became one of our mates. I wish I hadn't been such a dick.

Aside from perving on girls netball training on an almost daily basis there were many other perks about this new environment of mine! After the final bell had gone the entire school grounds (which were substantial) were ours and ours alone!! We played basketball on the top courts for hours, played cricket with 20 other boarders and had absolutely epic take no prisoners smash up derby style skateboard races down the schools main driveway. When I got home on weekends I would get my ass kicked for wrecking yet another pair of shoes (they were our brakes) and tearing clothes but I didn't care.....this was the best fun I had ever had and they couldn't stop me!!

I hated Fridays. Friday was the day that I had to leave my real home and go back to whatever hell hole I had been shoved to for that weekend. As a result of finally feeling somewhat empowered by boarding school I felt stronger at my Guardians home and he didn't like it at all. I buggered off as much as humanly possible, leaving to walk to 10am hockey games at 6am just so I wouldn't see any of them and I stayed in my room until they forced me out. Incredibly I would then get belted for not being part of the family.....for fucks sake.

In year 7 though I had grown and really started to fill out. I was a big lad and I was about the same height as my Uncle. I started to lift my eyes from the floor and stare right back at him as he threatened me which really pissed him off. The standard smacks around the head didn't really worry me much anymore and I didn't see stars as a result. I thoroughly hated him though.

As a result of this newfound confidence I was again shipped back to my Granmas. This went as poorly as it always had and I spent as little time there as possible often staying weekends at friends houses where their awesome parents fed me, washed my clothes and treated me like one of their own. I am forever grateful to these people and I hope they know it. One of the greatest things about my fellow boarding lads was that they lived in the country and I got to go there! I loved going to Damon's place where we rode bikes around his town with an air rifle strapped to our backs. We then made homemade explosives out of shot gun shells and threw them around the back paddocks!! It was amazing!!!

My most treasured mate during this time though was Timmy. He lived on a pretty decent sized farm, had wonderful parents, a super cool big brother, a hot big sister and an attic room! I went and stayed there as often as I could!! During these trips I learned to drive, shoot, roll a go-cart, skin rabbits, kangaroos and possums, wrestle sheep, slide cars around on gravel roads and ride a motorcycle (poorly at first) which was to become a lifelong passion.

These were some of the very best times in my life and what makes me laugh now is that these were pretty standard weekends for these country lads.....I couldn't believe how amazing it was!! I got really sick on one of these visit's and I simply couldn't get out of bed, sweating and aching all over. In the midst of this I remember Timmy saying something like' "Well if you didn't want to come you should have just said"bloody hell, if only he had known how much I loved being there.

Around this time a couple of things happened that would start to form another great love of my life... my love of hard rock guitar driven music. One of the older boarders (yr 10) was a completely mad bastard called Keany and Keany loved Metal! I remember one day he came up to our dorm (it was like the arrival of a Rock Star) and announced that we had to listen to his tape....which we duly did! This tape started with the classic intro to Iron Maidens track Number of the Beast which was played as loud as my little stereo could handle.....I was immediately hooked! Keany blessed me by taping some of his favoured track and soon I was pissing everyone off with shitty recordings of Metallica, Venom, W.A.S.P. and Accept to name just a few.....much to my ex wife and daughters disgust I have never lost my love of Rock n Roll!!!

Around this time something pretty bad happened. I was living at Granmas place again and we were constantly fighting. During one of these rolling fights I walked away from her into the laundry area slamming the door behind me.....then I heard an awful scream. I turned and opened the door to see my Granma holding her hand in the air as blood flowed freely from her index finger....well what was left of her index finger anyway. She had gone to follow me through the door and had been reaching out as I slammed the door. I looked down and here was the top knuckle of her finger complete with nail lying on the floor below me. I picked the digit up and put it in the fridgeas you do. The Ambulance was called, Granma was taken away and my Uncle arrived. He didn't speak to me, just glared a lot. The whole thing just felt so surreal to me.....Holy shit.....I had cut my Granma's finger off.....and I didn't even get a kicking!

Granma arrived home later that night minus a finger. I was sent to my room and no one wanted to speak to me for days. My Granma never let me forget what I had done and often raised her shortened finger and reminded me what I had done. I probably should have felt worse than I did.

In year seven I really started to fuck about at school I'm not sure what exactly happened, maybe my new confidence kicked in, but I started goofing off in class and started getting heaps of laughs from class mates.....I loved it!! This new found positive attention from my peers was like a drug and the more I got the more I wanted. Part of the school rules were that each student had a school diary which had to be at school at all times. This diary was primarily for receiving both good notes and bad notes from teachers depending upon your behaviour. Upon receiving a bad note you had to present yourself outside the Middle School Principals office to have him sign off on the note and receive punishment.....I should have got my mail delivered to his office because I just about lived there!

The middle School Principal in my first two years there was Fr. Kevin O'Mara. He was the single scariest thing in the School for newbies and no one wanted to have to go to his office for any reason whatsoever. Due to my shenanigans I was one of his most regular visitors and I got to know him pretty well from very early on. I got stacks of yard duty, after school detentions and smacks around the head from him but it was weird.....I felt closer to him than anyone in the school. Yeah he punished me but I knew I had earned it. He also talked to me though particularly in the evening after school in his office. By year 8 I was often in there talking to him about home and he tried to help me make sense of it all....he was a bloody good man to me and I am grateful for him. He left when I was in year 10 and died in Melbourne when I was in year 11. I got asked if I would like to represent the School at his funeral with some other Seniors and I went to Melbourne....my first trip away from Tassie. I felt very honoured to be there and grateful that the School had asked a troublesome lad like me to go along.....they obviously knew what he had meant to me.

Anyway, year 7 finished and it was back to my Uncles place for the holidays. It may have been about now or a bit earlier that we were going camping with our guardians....it looked great in photos but it was still shit. I was given many barked orders and clips around the ear whilst the adults sat around sipping drinks. One of the weirdest things about this was that we were in a public campsite and there were plenty of people in close proximity to witness the violence. No one seemed to care though.....as I copped a clipping other people would look up and then look away. A different time I guess.

In my young adult years I spoke to a few of my guardians friends that were often with us during these trips. A few of them actually said to me that they thought that the way we were treated was awful and they were very sorry that it had happened. As I said it was a different time and I don't

begrudge the fact that they didn't act.....I just hope that times have changed and that their now adult kids would do something if they saw what their parents had seen.

I did like camping though! I liked spending the days swimming, exploring, climbing trees to catch fat black red eyed cicadas and hunting for lizards. In addition I was becoming very interested in girls.....nothing like an Aussie beach camp ground to really start appreciating the female form!!

I also must add something else that I am grateful for inheriting from my Uncle, I love of cool cars and Hot Rods. My uncle was in the Early Ford Club and we spent a fair bit of time around these cool guys and their beautiful cars either competing at club "Go-Whoas" (Like a drag run but instead of just flying through the finish line at top speed the driver must try and stop with his front wheels on the finish line) burn out comps or just sitting around talking about the cars. It was cool to hang out with these guys and my Uncle wasn't as much of an asshole when his mates were around. The reason I mention this here is that one of my greatest memories of this camping summer was one of the great loves of my life, my Uncles Silver 1963 XM Ford Falcon Coupe. It was his daily driver and I absolutely loved it. Low and sleek, blue interior with middle folding front seats, white steering wheel, vinyl roof and Jelly bean mags. I still love it and if I ever win Lotto I am getting one!

Summer ended and year 8 began, I was wrapped to be back at school with my boarding brothers and afternoons watching netball training! I began as I had left off, being a disruptive shit to what felt like the admiration of my peers. The bad notes rolled in, my Uncle was called and I copped the usual but I didn't really care. They didn't want me at home, I wasn't doing anything bad enough to get expelled for and I think the school always knew that I was a kid with no parents and whose guardians weren't the most loving. I probably got away with more than I should have.

This was rather unfortunate for my year 8 home class teacher Brother John. This was the young Brother John's first teaching role and he was a happy friendly guy that was going to change the world.....that was until he met me. I truly did not give a fuck about what he said and how he demanded that I behaved. I could smell the fear on him and I made the poor bastards life a misery. Sadly for him I opened up all the chinks in his armour very early and pretty soon most of the other kids in 8 Black followed me through those chinks in one way or another. I was corrupting a class and I loved it. Home class and our English class was absolute mayhem with even the nerds playing up in their own way. By the end of first term Brother John had aged considerably. By the end of term 2 he was an angry beaten man. One day during term 2 I was being a pain in the arse as usual when he lost the plot. He yelled, threw his book against the black board and rushed at me. He grabbed me by the collar and threatened to do something to me that I can't remember. The class had gone dead quiet. Then, I burst out laughing with my face about 10cm from his.....this guy could do nothing to me and we both knew it. Then the entire class started laughing. I saw poor Brother John break inside, he let me go, turned and walked out the door. We never saw Brother John again. He left the school immediately and I don't know what happened to him.

This event and others like it started to make me feel stronger and I started to appreciate and observe other strong people, not bullies but those he could get things done without threats or violence.....there was just something about them. I observed both male and female teachers and I found myself drawn towards those who were able to get kids to comply with their requirements because they wanted to, not because they had to. I figured out around now that the school rules were really bullshit.....what could they really do to me?? When I obeyed these rules it was simply because I either respected the teacher or I couldn't be bothered with the drama. That was it.

On the other hand I openly despised those who relied on bullying or the fake respect given to those who were given power by a hierarchy. I had many battles with teachers like these and I have never lost my distaste for them. Most of these teachers just backed away and tried to avoid me but there were a few that still wanted to prove a point. I remember 2 of these run in's that were bigger than usual. The first was with a curly haired teacher that I never actually had for a class. It felt like he simply wanted a shot at the title and he got his chance. He called me out in front of a group in the playground and told me he wanted me to come with him. I asked why and he yelled louder. I went over to him and he quietly announced to me that he had heard of me and that if I fucked him about at all I would be truly sorry. I asked how would I be sorry which stunned him a bit so he hit me with two fingers across the jaw.....fuck that lit me up!! I leaned over to him and explained that if he ever fucking touched me again I would absolutely sort his shit out for him. I told him that I lived here, I was here all the time and that if I needed to I could get to him in many different ways. He looked at me blankly. I doubt he had ever been threatened by a year 8 student before. He didn't speak for a few moments and then said, "You watch yourself son" before walking away. He never spoke directly to me again.

The second was with my male PE teacher.....I think this was in grade 9 so sorry for skipping ahead a bit. He was a fit young guy in his early/mid 20's, the girls liked him and he loved being the cool teacher. I thought he was bullshit. In addition we had a young female PE teacher who I thought was just amazing! She was really nice, always laughing and was hot. She could have asked me to do anything and I would have.....unlike the male teacher. This became pretty obvious to the Mr. and he didn't like it. One day on the upper oval we were playing touch football and he flat out tackled me....absolutely nailed me! I wasn't at all ready for this because it was touch football you fucking moron!! He got up and said to me as I lay on the ground something like, "Not quite the big man now hey Elson". I lost my shit. I got up and launched at him taking him to the ground where I was on top but he was holding my wrists so I was having trouble punching him in his stupid face. Then I had Miss grabbing my shirt and screaming at me to stop.....it was my favourite teacher so I stopped and got off....he didn't let go of my wrists until he was up as well. Everyone in the class was standing there open mouthed and Miss told everyone to go to lunch including me. I walked away with myself and the male teacher eyeing each other off as men with unfinished business do. Incredibly Miss must have smoothed things over and I never heard another thing about it. I seemed to mostly do PE with Miss and when I did have it with Mr nothing was said and we both continued uneasily.

It's weird but many times in my life I have done something that I felt warranted a kicking only to receive nothing but other times I have copped it deluxe for bugger all. Not sure what that is all about really!

I don't want to continuously rave on about how much I hated home, I imagine you have the idea by now. Just know that nothing ever really changed with my guardians, Granma and myself. One thing was good at home though and that was my little cousins Kate and Mike. One of the only joys I had was being a big brother to these two, everything from feeding them and changing their nappies to taking them to the park for swings and reading them stories. I loved them very much and I miss them these days. I often wonder what could have been there but life is like that and there is no time for regrets. They were truly the lights of my home life. Around this time something else happened that made home life just a touch easier, my guardians decided to clad out the old workshop attached to the garage and make it my room. I loved it! I felt like it was my sanctuary.....Hardly anyone ever came out there aside from the kids and if it was raining I could pretty much be on my own all day. I think that both my guardians and I were far happier with this setup.

Year nine came around, the last year of middle school and I was wrapped to be placed in Father O'Mara's home class. Holidays had been shit as usual with my guardians buying a shack (partly with Mum's insurance money) and me spending most of my holidays working on gravelling driveways, building a bunkhouse and generally labouring. There was the occasional trip to the beach but not as many as I would have liked.

I had decided that I was going to do better at School this year. I had wasted year 8 and I wanted to do better to show everyone that I could. Unfortunately I found that my reputation had preceded me, it felt like every time I looked sideways I got a bad note and as far as lessons went I was watched like a hawk.

I had always really enjoyed English and Science but Maths completely baffled me.....it looked like it was written in Arabic and I just didn't get it. As a result I was placed in level 2 maths which wasn't quite Vegie maths but you could certainly see it from there! I was going to have a go though, surely it couldn't be that hard. Soon I was in class and we were working on some new Maths that I again had no clue about.....but I was determined. I listened, I studied and when the test came around I was as confident as I had even been before a maths test.

Next lesson we were handed back our tests, the teacher didn't even look at me as she handed mine back.....I had got 0 out of 10. Not one part was worthy of a tick. My insides just fell away and I wanted to cry right there, right then. I couldn't bring myself to talk to my teacher about it, she obviously assumed that I didn't give a shit as I hadn't in year 8. How could I explain to her that for once I had really tried and still failed miserably. I spent the afternoon by myself trying to work it out.....I was copping punishments as often as I had the year before and I had totally failed after doing my best.....I gave up and went back to not caring.

My year was then primarily filled with chasing girls, listening to Metal and playing basketball. Basketball actually brought about a big change in my life. I was still playing school and club hockey and I was doing pretty well. I had been in a few rep teams, not state like my brother but I was expected to go on and play A Grade etc. I was actually Captaining my club team when I decided I didn't want to play hockey anymore, I wanted to play basketball.

To say my Uncle and my coach were not happy was an understatement. My Uncle told me I was a dickhead and my Coach arrived at my School with a brand new Hockey stick for me as a gift if I didn't quit. It was a better stick than I had ever had! I didn't want to play anymore though so a new stick, no matter how cool it was, was pretty pointless. Also, my Uncle thinking I was a dickhead was pretty much par for the course so that was no biggie. I quit and took my own path for the first time. I loved doing that.

The previous year one of the more Senior boarders had left the School as he wanted to be closer to home. I knew Ax as well as well as I knew any of the senior guys, bit of a loose unit and with all due respect not at the highest echelons of academic achievement. Always up for a good time though! We were playing cricket up on the basketball courts when a few of the senior guys came up looking ashen faced. They told us that Ax had committed suicide. Fuck!

We had a boarders meeting and the brothers had a chat about what a good guy Ax had been and how he would be sorely missed. Nothing was ever mentioned about the fact that he had killed himself....it seemed to be taboo. I thought about it a lot. I wondered if it was worth it, wondered if Ax was in a better place as everyone loved to say, I wondered what had made him feel that bad that he gave up.

I was down plenty and I hated my home life. I sat at home more than once after a solid belittling looking at the rifle and shotgun that was kept in my cupboard with ammo and wondering if it was a better place, if it was a good option, if anyone would miss me. In truth though I never really considered offing myself....I guess I'm just not the quitting type.

Middle school drew to an end and I was about to step up again. Year 10 was on a different campus and the senior boarders lived in a different house away from all the juniors....

They lived in the Whitehouse!!

3. Senior School

The Whitehouse was situated front and centre of the school as you drove in, you had to drive around it to enter. It was the oldest part of the existing school, had separate rooms, balconies, a kitchen, very little supervision and it was home to the year 10,11 and 12 boarders. Junior Boarders were not allowed to enter without specific invite and were generally made to wait at the door if they wanted to speak to a senior boarder. It was sacred.

My first Sunday night back at school for year 10 was weird.....it felt like I was starting again. I rocked through the door of the Whitehouse (without invitation) and met Damon in there. We sort of stood around in the main lounge not sure exactly what to do. There was another guy there too, a new guy. His name was Ray, we extracted from him that he was from Rosebery on the wild West Coast, he clearly did not want to be there and that was about all he offered. Whatever! Pretty soon the boarding master arrived and we were allocated our rooms, I got a single room about 2m x 3m on the South side of the Whitehouse. Damon and Ray were allocated a shared room and Tim and Ben got their own rooms as well. Woodsy had left during middle school. There were a few Yr 11's, only one Yr 12 who kept to himself and that was the Senior boarders.

As we now had our own TV we watched TV trying to get used to our new level in life before hitting the sack in the luxury of our private rooms. In the morning we got up and after getting ready hung out in the lounge waiting for the Senior Boarders Bus to arrive, I was nervous, excited and proud to be a senior! All was going well until the Boarding master came in and asked where Ray was? "Ray who?? Oh the new guy.....nope haven't seen him"! Turned out that Ray had bolted during the night and was missing! Wow!! That made for some pretty cool first day goss!

Ray was located the next day in Melbourne at his Mum's place after getting to the Airport, buying a ticket and getting the fuck out of Dodge! A week later he was returned to us and was duly given the nick name "Runaway Ray".....it was quite an opening week for the new guy! Ray didn't run away again, became an integral part of our group and to this day is one of my best and most trusted friends.....I am honoured to be the Godfather of his son.

Senior School was certainly a step up. There was far more freedom and far less of those weak bullying teachers that I discussed earlier. These guys knew their stuff and were far better at handling me than most of the middle school teachers, I learned a lot of life skills from them. In addition a lot of my reputation for being difficult had been left behind and I was, to a degree, turning a new page. I could still get myself in the shit rapidly but it was because I deserved it and it was generally handled at a lower level. I started to feel different and stopped fucking about quite as much. As far as my peers went we were certainly back at the bottom rung but there was far less of a division between years 10,11 and 12 as there had been in middle school. Everyone was pretty cool and my ability to play a half decent game of the highly illegal "Animal Ball" gave me an opportunity to hang out with the 11's and 12's on a fairly even level. This relationship came in handy a few

months later when I tried out for basketball with our American Coach. I was picked for both the yr 10 side and the Varsity (Open) teams which I was very proud of. I learned a lot from these older guys, especially on our road trip up North later in the year!

In year 10 I started to seriously question my thoughts on religion. I remember sitting in a Religious Education lesson (compulsory in my Catholic School) thinking to myself, this is all a crock of shit. My Mum had always taken us to Church, then my Granma insisted that we attend Church, then the School made me go every Tuesday of middle school. I had lived with Priests, Brothers and Nuns for 3 years and I had seen the best and the worst of them. I asked many questions of these Religious people about my Mum and Dad and my problems at home. They never had anything but a stupid rehearsed answer like, "All things happen for a reason" or "It's all part of Gods plan" or some such practised bullshit. If I questioned the Religious Ed teachers they were just as bad and no one could give me any answers. From then on I bullshitted Granma about going to Church on Sundays and just rode around on my bike for an hour or so before heading home saying that it was a lovely service. No one ever checked up.

One thing I was struggling with at this time was my temper. It had always been fiery but these days I tended to be going off more and bigger. I was a very angry young man inside and I was struggling to hold it in, often fighting with other kids or explosively losing my shit over very small things. Looking back I think this may have been a pressure cooker type issue. As I mentioned earlier I was so violently and cruelly controlled at home that I was basically powerless but I would then be released to a place where I had power over smaller weaker people even though I knew it was wrong and I have often hated myself for it. I was always smiling and messing about but inside I had a whole heap of hate. Hate for my Uncle, Granma, God and myself.

On the flipside I was doing better at school now, perhaps the expectation that I had to be a clown each day had died off. We were treated like young adults, not kids and I really enjoyed this feeling of respect. I was enjoying a few classes, especially English and Science and my grades were going in the right direction. I wasn't praised for my academic achievement but maybe I wasn't a dumbass!! I was still hopeless at Maths though dammit.....

As I felt things were getting better at school my Uncle said he wanted to talk to me. He sat me down and told me that they felt that going on to year 11 was a waste of time and money as I was probably going to be a labourer for my life. I was stunned. I had taken a mate to our shack once that had told them that when he left school he was going to be a labourer and they were aghast, they spent ages telling him that he was better than that and why would he aim so low. Yet here my Uncle was telling me that I was only worth this low position in life. He didn't try and tell me I was worth more or that I could make it better.....he just matter of fact told me that I wasn't worth the money. I had always thought I would do year 11 and 12 but I wasn't exactly set on it until that very moment. Maybe my Uncle was doing a bit of reverse psychology, maybe he wasn't but it certainly worked that way.

Mid way through year 10 something cool happened, something that would change my life. I met a girl named Alf. She was a very quiet red head in my Science class and in all honesty I didn't really notice her for a while, I was too busy chatting up the other better known girls. After a while I found myself sitting next to her and getting the odd laugh, she was smarter than me but wasn't as socially adept at that point in time. I liked her and we became friends.

I tried to get closer to her but she wasn't really interested. I hung out with her a fair bit and it felt really easy. Eventually we ended up being classed as boyfriend and girlfriend but in truth it wasn't really like that. Everyone else was madly shagging (I had certainly done my fair share) but we never

did. It was more friends and even more importantly I became very close to her family. They were the Wilsons and they were so very different from my guardians or my Granma. They were welcoming, encouraging and positive and it created an amazing feeling in their home. Dramas were not solved by a public dressing down or a smack around the head, they were discussed often as a group, in a calm and reasonable manner. There wasn't always an agreement but if required there was a compromise rather than a stalemate. It actually took me a fair while to be at ease with this style of family and I often got overly aggressive or defensive in those earlier times. After a while though I felt accepted and valuable and I felt more at home with these people than I had ever felt anywhere in my life. They cared about me! That was over 30 years ago and the Wilsons are still (thankfully) what I refer to as my Foster parents and my kids grandparents.

I spoke to the Wilsons about my Uncle suggesting that I finish school in year 10 and they were horrified. Unbeknownst to my guardians they came to the School and spoke on my behalf to the Senior School Principal and spoke about the issue. There was a problem in my doing any higher level studies in metric (level 3's) as I had never been in a level 3 class and wasn't therefore considered capable by those that set the curriculum. The Wilsons argued my case and I was asked whether I felt I would be able to handle the workload and whether I would put in the effort required. With my Uncles words ringing in my head I straight up lied and said I would was very confident and would be doing all required. I wasn't sure exactly what that was but I had to have a go. Eventually it was decided that I could do one level 3 class and 4 level 2 classes. If I could pass all of these I could do more level 3's in year 12. That level 3 class was Biology and as you will find out I'm so glad it was!

Year 10 started to wrap up and it was determined that I was going to matric. Here goes nothing!!

4. Matriculation

Interesting times at the start of year 11, a lot of my friends had left school in year 10 for apprenticeships and new social cliques were forming. This wasn't a big deal particularly as I had always flitted between groups depending on how I felt at the time so the transition was pretty easy for me. What I was nervous of though was Biology.....were level 3's as hard as I had always imagined them to be??

I rocked into bio putting on a brave face and there was my teacher, Mrs. Mac. Mrs Mac was a full of beans English girl in what I would guess was her mid 20's with a cracking accent and a pixie hairstyle. She was lovely! I'm not sure if she knew my background but if she did she never mentioned it. The year kicked off and I could understand the work just fine. Where I struggled though was I didn't have any experience with actual studying and I hadn't ever had to write papers or convey my understanding to this level before. I got it but I couldn't tell anyone that I got it!

I then had an experience very similar to my 0% maths test in year 9. We had a Bio test and I thought I had done pretty well right up until we were given our results.....I had failed badly. My misery burst forth again....I was no good.....I got up and ran out of the class.

A friend of mine came and found me and she coaxed me back to class to see Mrs. Mac. I explained to her that I felt that I knew it and couldn't understand how I had failed so miserably. Now here was the difference between my old maths teacher and Mrs. Mac.....she cared! She asked me if I would put a Saturday aside with her to learn how to study and how to write my answers at a higher level. I agreed and a few weeks later she came around to my house where we sat at the kitchen table with paper and heaps of different coloured pens. That day she explained to me how she studied, having a different colour for every new point so it stood out, what to study and how to expand on my answers. This was one of the most productive days of my life and it changed me forever. I am still no

scholar but I have passed through School, the Police Academy, many Police courses and qualification exams, Real Estate Licences and courses and 2 Diplomas. I still use different coloured pens. I passed Bio and all my other classes and was allowed to study higher levels in year 12.....thank you so much Mrs. Mac.

During year 11 I did a lot of thinking about my life and my situation. More than I had ever done before. The more I understood about how different my home life was to other people's home lives were the more confused, angry and trapped I felt. Why was this happening to me?? What had I done to deserve all of this bullshit?? I didn't ask to be here!! I didn't want Mum to die or Dad to be a drunk!! I hated where I lived, who I lived with and I just wanted to be out!!! One night I was awake for hours thinking about it all and I just lost it.....I started crying before the Sun was up and I just kept crying for hours and hours. It was like everything was pouring out of me.....all the grief.....all the hate....all the beatings.....all the belittling's and nasty sarcasm....it was just running out of me and I couldn't stop it.

Sometime during the day my Aunt came out to my room presumably to look for me. She found me sitting on the floor bawling and asked me what was wrong.....I couldn't tell her because I didn't know. She then left and returned a few minutes later to tell me that she had called Mrs. Wilson....I was astonished that my Aunt couldn't think of any way of comforting me herself and had resorted instead to calling a person that my guardians had never particularly been fond of.

In hindsight it was perfect.

After this my relationship with my guardians deteriorated even more. I truly didn't give a fuck about my guardians and they didn't seem to give a fuck about me. I was 6 foot and about 95kg by now and I could handle myself well so the punches and slaps had dried up a fair bit. The nastiness continued at the usual pace though.....The jibes about my Dad were now replaced with jibes about going to the Wilsons which I did at every opportunity. At one point we were away at our shack and my Uncle was ripping into me when he pulled out the "If you don't fucking like it maybe you should go to the Wilsons"! I packed my shit up and started out down the road with him yelling at me that I would be back. It took me all day but I hitch hiked the 200km or so back to the Wilsons and presented myself at their front door! As usual I was greeted like family. I then rang the shack to tell them that I was ok.....they just hung up in my ear.

During year 11 I met a new guy to the School. We were both obsessed with basketball and rap music (as it was known). He lived with his Mum who was a complete artist hippythere were basically no rules in his house. I hung out with him heaps and we did whatever we wanted. We were drinking, smoking dope and roaming the street at all hours of the night singing NWA's most anti-social lyrics at the top of our lungs. We were complete dickheads but we thought we were so cool! I did and still do enjoy a drink but dope was never really my thing.....I was useless stoned and just sat in the corner giggling like an idiot. It also made me a little paranoid which leads onto some other disasters later in my life.

On one of these nights we were out and about at around 3am being wankers when a car rolled up next to us. It was a couple of detectives wanting to know who we were, where we were from and what we were doing out at 3am. I don't think we had been drinking but we were obviously deeply influenced by the Classic Rap songs, "Fuck tha Police" (NWA) and "Fight the Power" (Public Enemy) so we told the Police that we didn't have to tell them shit whilst glaring at them looking as Gangsta as fuck!

One of the D's took a step forward and smacked me hard in the head.

Suddenly we weren't all that Gangsta any more.....my mate told the cops his details and mine so fast that he sounded like a typewriter! He would have happily told them anything about anyone as I also would have if my ears would stop ringing!! The D's took our details and told us to get straight home before driving off. We did exactly what we were told as fast as possible.....

Year 12 rolled around soon enough and we were now back at the top of the food chain. It was awesome to be back at School and back to seeing my mates. I was doing 4 level 3's and felt like I was doing ok....the advice from Mrs. Mac was really helping.

The tension with my guardians was getting worse. They made it as uncomfortable as possible for me. One Friday I was at the Whitehouse waiting to get picked up to go home as usual. Hours passed and no one came which was unusual to say the least. I rang home but there was no answer. Eventually one of the brothers gave me a lift home. No one was there, the house was locked up and after I got in through a window there was no food in the house. I rang the shack and found out that they were there, my Uncle sarcastically said that he had just assumed that I wouldn't want to go to the shack anymore after I hitched home. Maybe I should go stay with the Wilsons.

That's exactly what I did. I was pissed off though....I was truly sick of this bullshit now.

A few weeks later my Uncle announced that I would be unable to go anywhere over the weekend as I would be digging up the old driveway so that they could put a new lawn in. They hired a jack hammer and I was on it all Saturday. If you haven't used a jack hammer it's a shit job, they are heavy, your body is vibrating viciously the whole time, your palms blistering and it is ridiculously loud. I was on it from breakfast through to dinner with drink stops and lunch.....at least I didn't have to speak to anyone....

By dusk I was completely and utterly exhausted and my hands were stinging but surprisingly my Uncle commented on what good job I had done. That's nice I thought! I then got told to set the table so I did so. My Uncle then bellowed at me because I had put plastic Saxa Salt and Pepper shaker on the table. I'm pretty sure I gave him a pissed off teenage look then, for fucks sake I had just busted my ass for him all day and he's yelling at me because of a salt shaker.....was the Queen dropping around for dinner or something??

Then he just cracked me, a swinging right hand around the face.

Fuck this. I wasn't having this shit anymore.

I stepped forward, grabbed him by his collar and drove him back over the kitchen bench. I held him there on his back and yelled at him that if he ever touched me again I would punch the shit out of him. He looked completely bewildered and was staring straight at me, on his back and at my mercy. I let him go and backed away. He got up rushed at me and punched me in the face, there were pieces of tooth in my mouth and the taste of blood. I turned to go out the back door and he grabbed me by the hair and dragged me in that direction down the stairs. When we got outside I pulled away and we grabbed each other face to face, he was absolutely enraged. He was hitting me in the side of the head as we stumbled around the side of the house, saying through gritted teeth, "So you think your fucking good enough do you asshole" "you're fucking gone mate, gone"! I stopped him and pushed back, I then cocked my fist and was lined up on his face. I didn't hit him though....I just couldn't.....I had been in plenty of fights and punched plenty of faces but I don't know if it was all the years of being forced to respect him but I just couldn't bring myself to hit him in the face. He then punched me flush in the left eye, splitting me open. I kept wrestling him on the front lawn, I could hear my

brother screaming that he was going to call the cops, my Aunt screaming something and the kids crying.

Then a car pulled into our driveway and the headlights shone directly at us fighting on the front lawn. It was Alf and her grandmother, I didn't know she was coming around but their arrival changed the situation entirely. My Uncle and I let each other go and I ran over to the car, I could still hear my brother crying and yelling as I got in and told Alf's Grandmother to drive. Alf was staring at the scene wide eyed and her Grandmother just sat there.....I yelled at her to get out of there and she reversed out. I'm not sure how she got us to the Wilsons but she did, she was silent and shaking like a leaf. Alf was in tears and I was bleeding.

When we got there obviously the Wilson's were shocked. They were not violent people and weren't used to this sort of thing. Mrs Wilson started patching me up and Mr Wilson said he was going to see my Uncle to sort this out. I told him not to but he did. He came back half an hour later and didn't say much aside from the fact that I wasn't going back there for a while. Thank fuck I thought!

Mr. Wilson didn't talk about his meeting for a long time but it turns out it had been pretty unpleasant. He had been told that I was never ever to return and they were welcome to me. I was allowed back the next morning to collect the stuff out of my room but aside from that I was never again to go to the house. Alf and I went back in the morning and collected as much of my stuff as we could fit in her Mum's Ford Laser and left.

I never stayed there again.

This was one of the most important and ultimately life changing days of my life. "You're fucking gone mate" was dead right, I was gone and I was never coming back. This felt like the beginning of the rest of my life and it felt great. The Wilson's kept saying that they were sure we could sort things out and I kept thinking why the hell would I ever want to sort anything out. The constant anxiety, conflict, confusion and hatred of living with my guardians was gone.....I was free!

Often in my life it has often been the moments that appeared the most tumultuous, the most cataclysmic that, in hindsight, have given me the most opportunity. That night as I sat there bloodied and bleeding I felt like the sun had finally come up and like tons and tons of weight had come off me. I had no idea of what the future held but at least it felt like I actually had one!

I walked away from that part of my life without any thoughts aside from that things were going to get better.