

# Unhinged

A self-help guide on how to fuck up your life

Brendon Luke

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Brendon Luke

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This is a work of fiction.

All of the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional,

and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

This book is dedicated to me.

Based on a True Story

# Contents

<b>ACCEPTANCE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. <b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
2. <b>Your True Home.....</b>	<b>3</b>
3. <b>The Ending that Was a Beginning .....</b>	<b>5</b>
4. <b>The Move.....</b>	<b>10</b>
5. <b>The Farm House .....</b>	<b>13</b>
6. <b>Resting .....</b>	<b>15</b>
7. <b>A Loving Family .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>POWERLESS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
8. <b>Grandma .....</b>	<b>20</b>
9. <b>Anorexia Sucks .....</b>	<b>24</b>
10. <b>Ella .....</b>	<b>30</b>
11. <b>Blake the Broken .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>ELIMINATE .....</b>	<b>33</b>
12. <b>Lives Still Being Destroyed.....</b>	<b>33</b>
13. <b>Being Blind.....</b>	<b>37</b>
14. <b>Delmar Heights.....</b>	<b>41</b>
15. <b>Wood of the Green.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>MEDITATION.....</b>	<b>47</b>
16. <b>Death at a Funeral.....</b>	<b>47</b>
17. <b>Body and Soul .....</b>	<b>50</b>
18. <b>Finn .....</b>	<b>52</b>
19. <b>Lost.....</b>	<b>58</b>
20. <b>I'm in Love with the Coco.....</b>	<b>62</b>
21. <b>Your Love is My Drug .....</b>	<b>64</b>

<b>ENTRUST .....</b>	<b>65</b>
22. <b>Week 1 – The Opening .....</b>	<b>65</b>
23. <b>The Partay .....</b>	<b>74</b>
24. <b>Downfall.....</b>	<b>76</b>
25. <b>Hospital: Corrupt Much? .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>REFLECTION .....</b>	<b>94</b>
26. <b>No Fear .....</b>	<b>94</b>
27. <b>Forgive.....</b>	<b>97</b>

# Acceptance

## 1. Introduction

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This book was not designed to deter you.

To give you any misleading facts or try to guide you to some sort of “responsible life.”

It is simply here for you to read, judge, and let you learn that when you reach a certain point, when you reach a certain epiphany, you will hopefully find that saving grace, that you can always find within yourself. A sort of spiritual power you've created, to entrust your own thoughts, and act upon them. To know that limbo of any stage, right or wrong, that we all work differently. And it is only when we find the courage to trust our self as a whole that we can move forward with ease.

This book is a memory of what I don't want to do. A memory of what many bad judgment calls can lead to. This book may be hypocritical at times. It is about mental health issues, alcoholism, anxiety, fighting for what was right, while also trying to discover who I was, no matter how long it took. To realise that everyone is different.

You'll see sadness, the subtleties of life, plus all the joys that come with it.

You should never be ashamed of who you are! You can disappoint yourself, and it's ok; you can make huge life changing fuck ups, and it's ok! But damn, I'd rather fucking try fucking something up, than to have never fucked it up to begin with.

*“There is a Buddha in all of us, it’s called buddhanature, the capacity of being aware of what is going on.... There is a Buddha in every one of us, and we should allow the Buddha to walk.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Being an addict is a full-time job; it eats into every part of your day. Do I have alcohol? When can I drink the alcohol? Do I have to work today or later? Can I drink a bottle before I need to start work?

While I sit here and write this, I'm drinking my chalice of wine, 80s and 90s hits are playing in the background. Matt and Emma (my roommates), just arrive home from work, as I slouch on the couch. My laptop that has created so many stories in the past is present on the bench.

I've always had an addictive personality, so what comes naturally with that, a drinking habit. You could say, I'm a functioning alcoholic. As in, I actually function better when I drink, than when I don't.

If I'm hungover, of course, I am less proactive and productive at doing things around the house, or even participating in my job enough to be useful. But as soon as I pick that glass of white wine up again that afternoon, “Brendon is back.” It's like I'm a phoenix reborn. Drinking was my sense of identity, which in itself sounds like I am dependent on wine, and I fucking was.

This book isn't about allowing judgmental bitches to pretend that they think going “alcohol free”, “sets them free.” That may be the case for certain people, but just because it works for one person, doesn't mean it works for all. This is my story, not anyone else's, so take it in as a documentary, and decide for yourself. I'm not here to make you love me, hate me, or stalk me. As I used to say to Milena & Matt, my amazing housemates, YOU DO YOU!

## 2. Your True Home

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*“Your true home is in the here and now, it is not limited by time, space, nationality, or race.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Cooking is an art; one my mother never tried or wished to conquer. For me, cooking is something that relaxes me. I pour a glass of white or red, depending on the mood, and start to create a meal that will hopefully be enjoyed, a therapeutic way of letting my inner thoughts spill onto a chopping board, creating something that becomes a token of moving forward.

It's hard to be a gracious person, someone that is thankful for what they have been given. This is something my generation has yet to absorb, and yet I'm also a culprit. As a child, I saw my father return home late from work every night, looking with no appreciation on what my mother had prepared for dinner. Yet her face never lost its smile.

Move 25 years into the future, and I still see that smile. COVID - 19 is currently raging, and self- isolation has become the new world order. I apply for jobs, I clean, I mow. Companies are going bust and it seems like everything is falling down around us. Even my parents are buying toilet paper (I thought they were smarter than that). But this story isn't about the panic, the stupidity of Australians or ScoMo, No, this story is about the stupidity of me not being paid enough attention (I know, typically millennial).

I see my dad return from his nine-to-five job at the real-estate agency, nothing too overbearing, He is in his 60s and still fuffs out of control most of the time throughout the day. (You still don't get to complain, Brendon, you complete twat!).

Mother has been on the phone all day. Who would have thought, because we started to ignore the boomers, that they would get in on the fun of joining the technology age and start to ignore back?



My dad arrives home. My mother is speaking to my sister via the phone. Dad walks through the door. I say 'Hello,' excited to talk to someone new. Dad ignores my hello and engages in the conversation with my sister over the phone instead. I pour him a wine and welcome him; I get a slight nod.

I have Barbra Streisand playing in the background (Let me guess? Fucking Woman in Love?), because who else would you fucking play on a casual afternoon in the middle of a farm property? The sound of the music is distracting dad from his focus of the call, he casually walks over to the boom box and switches it off, even though it is on its lowest level.

We created a distance. It was easier to communicate through things, rather than face to face, easier to express love through a text rather than a meal plated at dinner time. We became lost in our own forward thinking and dignity to be seen as functional. I had always had an aversion to phones at the dinner table, especially when I hosted extravagant dinners at my rental in Delmar, because that's what gays do. Phones were always banned during dinner time. "No phones on the table," I used to say. It was our new lifeline, a disconnected box that would give us attention, no matter what we did. Another way to disconnect with friends, family and workers. A new excuse to confide in our broken structures and ethics, one I would learn very fast in my new job at the hospital.

### 3. The Ending that Was a Beginning

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When I lost my job at the Northern Beaches Hospital in early December 2019, I was devastated. It sent me into a shock wave of unfortunate events, a sort of all out self-destruction. Self-destruction was one thing I was actually good at; I had done it plenty of times before. If anything, it was my fucking forte.

I wasn't one of those people that believed the world was against me, or that I had it rougher than others. I grew up in the bible belt of The Hills being a gay man. Rather than feeling like I was an outcast in the community, I flourished against such challenges. The way I dealt with them was obviously not the healthiest, and if I did get a setback or a spanner in the works, rather than self-destruct onto others, I imploded within myself.

I would drink to excess, I would get another credit card, book a holiday and rack up a shit load of debt, with the idea of coming back to pay off my recent mistakes. A sense of me saw it as a kind of "moving forward." To return to the normal routine and start in a new work force or world, where I believed I would finally find my fit. Except, of course, my aversion to rules, which doomed each new start.

After trying to fight for what was right at DHM, with no support from my co-workers, I lost faith in team ideals. I then moved to Clinical Labs, where I saw another useless bitch of a boss take advantage whenever she could and let the rest of us suffer. When I finally got the job down in Emergency Admissions, I felt I had finally found my place in the working system.

However, this new home broke me more than any prior job. To truly believe you were part of a team, to then get thrown under the bus to cover for an incompetent team leader, was more of a shock than I was ready for. Now I'm

not talking about thrown under or thrown in front of any bus here. I'm talking the Regina George, getting hit by the bus outside her High School, in a 'Mean Girls' kind of bus smack. SMACK! BANG! BROKEN, from head to toe, and not just physically.

It took me two weeks to come out of shock after I had been sacked for "allegations of misconduct." I did not leave the house, I definitely drank too much, I smoked too much and I slept most of the day. The stain they had left on me continued to resonate throughout my being. I felt sick, I felt tired, but most of all, I felt betrayed by the system that had shown me, again, its true colours.

I sat down one afternoon, broken and lonely. I decided to come to an understanding with myself. That no matter who I worked for, no matter whether I did something wrong or right, it still had the potential to end in the same way: with someone in power causing unwarranted pain on those below them. This notion had not only been true throughout my work history, but it had forced me to lose hope within the working world. My new unprecedented standard became: to not trust, to expect betrayal, to expect that most human beings were complete and utter shit heads.

I was fired two weeks before Christmas, it wasn't like anyone was putting up jobs, I had to apply for Centrelink payments to get myself through the month of December and January, then the plan was to look for a new job.

It took me 6 weeks to get my Centrelink government support approved through New Start Allowance. I'm a 31-year-old man; I have worked since I was 14 years old. I have never been on Centrelink payments, but the process was beyond barbaric. All I needed was a few weeks help before I got back on my feet. Once I was finally approved, I found out that if you are fired on "allegations of misconduct", they deduct 4 weeks of your payments from when you first lodged your application.

The funny part of this process is that now that another 7 percent of the population has lost their jobs due to COVID-19, Centrelink is experiencing mayhem.

I had put money aside for rent, money aside for food and so forth. Plus, I still had all the interest on my credit cards. I went into financial hardship. Before COVID-19 you would have naturally assumed I was a self-hating narcissist, that I was complaining about going on the dole, pretending I was better than the "other folks" that used the system.

When you're 31 and you have to go to your parents and your sister for help with money issues, you know you've really fucked up. The shame that comes with asking for help can become unbearable before you actually do it. I was ashamed of myself that this had happened, that I had put myself in this position, that I could potentially become homeless because I didn't have my finances under control, that I was living from paycheck to paycheck like most Australians.

Father had started a new job as a Strata Manager at Freshwater in early 2019. He liked the job, but the people he worked with were useless and argumentative. He wasn't over fussed with the job nor the position he had been given. Mother was missing the old ways of living on a property and having space around her. Their new apartment was surrounded by people coming in and out, and there was more than one crazy person that inhabited the units in their complex. My sister Gaia had bought her unit two years prior up in Newport. Gaia was having trouble with her neighbours, plus the building maintenance problems were increasing from month by month. It was time for her to get out.

We decided to sit down as a family. We caught up every Sunday for dinner because we all lived so close. We had always thrown the idea around about moving to a property down South, somewhere slightly more affordable on a few

acres, have a veggie patch, a few animals and a hell of a lot more space, so we could live off the land and become a weird tight-knit family community, the sort of people you stare at when you visit Byron Bay, but without the massive amounts of weed in their systems, or at least a little less than they have. Sounds corny and unrealistic I know, but it had always been a dream for all of us, and since everything was basically falling down around us, it was like it was finally time to sync up as a family once again. It was odd because everything started to fall into place very quickly and very easily.

The next week dad had applied for a real-estate job down South in Berry, landing the job the week after. Before committing to the role of now "new housewife," I sat down and started to throw out some plans of what the best approach would be. I suggested finding a rental property for half year, or a year.

The idea was to use these 12 months to see if we liked the area and see if we could all live as one family again. We had been all in our own separate housing arrangements for a good decade now.

Dad took the job, with a start date of a month later. In the first two weeks Gaia had sold her apartment, and I had organised things with my roommates and landlords to be out by March 11<sup>th</sup> 2020. We found the perfect rental property and rented it from the first of March; everything was falling together, and very quickly. It only took one month from the first discussion of us uprooting our lives and moving to Berry before it actually happened.

Most people would probably have had 18 breakdowns within this time due to the amount of changes and stress we were facing as a family. I definitely had doubts. I was even fearful that I was just copping out because I was in such a bad mental state, somewhere to retreat back too, something which I knew was a safety net for me. I had so much debt, and no income besides my government help, which just paid for my rent and food for the week. I really did not have any other choice.

I never thought I would move back in with my parents, mostly because we were so different. But over the last few years we had all become a little more relaxed, a little more progressive in our thoughts. The fact was, my family had always loved and supported me. The next 12 months was going to be more than a move; it was going to be a new and exciting experiment, one I now knew could be accomplished.

## 4. The Move

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*“A Zen master who has attained awakening is someone whose eyes are open to living reality. She is someone who, after being lost in the world of concepts, has returned home to see the cypress in the courtyard and her own nature.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

My sister had purchased tickets to go see Johnathan Van Ness’s comedy show on the Friday before moving South to Foxground. These tickets had been purchased months in advance, and DAMN GURL, he was good, and by good, I mean, FUCKING HILARIOUS.

Two trucks would be booked, one to arrive at my place in Dee Why and another at Gaia’s Apartment in Newport. They would load our furniture and goods, then head to Narrabeen to collect our parent's items, so to say the least, it was going to be a big day.

After all our goods had been collected, the idea was to have a quick lunch, followed by Mum, Dad and I driving down South. A good two-and-half-hour drive to our new rental. We would then unload our cars with the basic goods, blow up beds, sleep the night, and wait for the arrival of the removal truck the next morning at six am to unload.

It took four rather hot Brazilian men and the owner, Phil, to load up my stuff, Gaia's stuff, and my parents' stuff. So naturally they only sent two dudes to unload the entire truck. If we were going to get this truck unloaded by midday at our new rental, we needed to put our knees down and our arses up, ready to get the pounding we deserved.

Now, I am more of a Marie Kondo kind of fan, I have exactly what I need, and that's it. One coat, one blanket, so on and so forth. I don't have any knickknacks that I had been given while growing up. I don't have my school jumper from year six. Not to say that I'm not sentimental; I don't like having spare crap I don't need. If it's useless to you as a person, chuck it out.

Gaia and my parents, however, are on the complete opposite end of the spectrum. They're hoarders, compared to me. When you bring in your Dad's 18th bag of clothing you start to wonder how he can wear every item once in the year.

Gaia is more of the knickknack, junk kind of girl. For example, I found an old mobile phone that looked like it was from the early 2000s. But we all have our quirks, and my family has theirs. I threw out the mobile. The fact is I can't technically call them hoarders. It's just frickin annoying when you have to empty 85 boxes of unnecessary shit. The best one I found was a 1 by 1-meter box that only contained teas: not all different types of teas, just a shit load of the same tea!

Now, our two handy hot removal men that got the brunt of the unloading, Thomas and Sebastian, were a little clueless in their reassembling of items; for example, my couches from Freedom ended up with their legs screwed on backwards.

While the boys unloaded, Mother and I had our scissors ready in hand to cut the tape off all the furniture which had been wrapped up in their big blue moving mats (I just realised this sounds like a really bad beginning of a porn video. I just threw up).

Once mother and I had done the bulky goods, we started to unpack the boxes for the kitchen, pantry and the other essential kitchen items.



I was pretty damn impressed with everyone's efforts that day. We did the entire kitchen (including setting up the two fridges), the lounge room including the carpet, coffee table and TV. My bed was set up from scratch and my clothes were packed away. We were settling into our farmhouse with ease and excitement.

## 5. The Farm House

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*“Happiness means feeling you are on the right path. You don’t need to arrive at the end of the path in order to be happy.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

The house itself was located at Foxground on the South Coast of Australia. It was situated on an acre of land surrounded by lush green mountains, cows, lamas and bulls. You could see two neighbours’ houses in the distance, but they were far enough away that you could not see a person walking outside. We were in a big green oasis of solitude, surrounded by nature, peaceful sounds and beautiful sunsets. A rock and roll path to sanity; not a rehab, a choice of understanding with oneself, without everyone else adding their irrelevant opinions.

The entrance to the house was off the main road that led down into Foxground. We had a tiled driveway with a double-door garage that didn’t work. Once you had parked, you followed the walkway down to the entrance of the house. On the path down you saw an odd huge spikey-like plant/tree situation, I have never seen anything like it in my life. It looked like it was from the Dinosaur era.

Next to it was a small fishpond, sadly with no fish. To the left of the entrance door was a small deck that led into the main bedroom and ensuite. It had been refurbished into a main bedroom since the 6-seater indoor spa that had occupied the room previously was no longer sustainable (Especially since we were on tank water). It was the perfect location to ride out the coming Apocalypse of 2020 (Thought: I'm now thinking 2022 with the Second Wave).

Once you were in the house, you saw a hallway with beautiful hard wooden floors. If you looked straight ahead, you would see the kitchen, with a wide

gaping window in front. It looked straight out onto the mountains, which surrounded the cottage.

To the right was the first living room. It stretched meters along the length of the front of the house. Off to the left was another hallway, just before the kitchen entrance. It was carpeted, and led to all the bedrooms, as well as the second bathroom.

There was no linen press (Fuck I'm super gay!) or any storage other than the main wardrobes in the bedroom. However, there was a small, dank, space usually referred to in American houses as a Mud Room, where you come out of the snow and de-clothe to enter the house.

The Mud Room then led into the main lounge at the front of the house, with two huge windows allowing you to stare into the distance. On the right you went out onto a huge wooden balcony which led around the front of the house. On the left you had another enclosed balcony just outside the kitchen. The kitchen had stools all around the bench, and the double pantry with non-slamming drawers made you feel like you were in heaven (Damn! Super-gay again!).

The red brick house was only one level. It sat directly in the middle of the one-acre block, surrounded by newly cut green grass. A bull to the left of us usually sat stood? at the fence line staring into our block. Mum talked to him frequently, and soon they became good friends. Gaia and Mum named him Neville. It was here that dad started his new job a week into our move down south, Mother and I both jobless began the simple life, resting when necessary and staying productive so we would keep a level head.

## 6. Resting

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*“Suppose someone is holding a pebble, throws it in the air, the pebble begins to fall down into the river. After the pebble touches the surface of the water, it allows itself to sink. It reaches the bed of the river without any effort. The pebble is now at the bottom of the river, it continues to rest. It allows the water to pass by.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Mother and I awoke on a casual Friday morning. It was the first week we had moved into the farmhouse. This was our first opportunity during that week with time to rest. We woke late, ate our breakfast, and I started to do some editing on my book. Mother at this point suggested a walk. We had been dying to get out and about as it had been raining for the past few days. Also, I wanted to get on my sister's bicycle and venture down the road to look at the potential farmer hubbies I could seduce.

Dad had planned for us to meet him in town at midday to pick up a desk. Mum and I left at 10.30 for a walk/ride. I ventured ahead sometimes and circled back to Mother. I stopped to visit two beautiful brown horses. they gave me the brush off, but their presence was still peaceful.

On the other side of the driveway that divided the paddocks stood a beautiful black horse. She came running towards me at full speed, halting at the fence and letting out a huge neigh. The black beauty was acting strange, not that I'm a horse whisperer or anything but she seemed concerned. I looked her up and down and saw that her back right leg on the knee area was swollen to twice the size of the other, with a huge gaping cut. It looked terribly sore, but she didn't seem to be in any pain, nor limping on the leg.

We continued our journey down the road that was hardly a road. I could hear water in the distance, as we approached a stream.

Before we left the house, I had told Mum to leave it unlocked. We lived on a rural property. We hadn't seen anyone for days, and our handyman that had visited us the week before said not to bother, "There is no need to lock up around this area," he said. Old habits die hard.

### Habit Energy

*"We have to learn the art of stopping – stopping our thinking, our habit energies, our forgetfulness, the strong emotions that rule us"*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

During our blissful walk I had left my key at home; it was not required for a farm-awakening ride down the road. I had written in family chats on WhatsApp before we had left that Mother and I were going for a walk/ ride, to inform father. Twenty minutes into our adventure and resting pace, Father messaged saying, "Instead of 12, can you come meet me now and pick up the table?" This was followed by another message, "I'm already on my way to the Antique store. I'll meet you there shortly."

Mother and I were about two kilometres from home as we had walked briskly. Father's question wasn't really a question, it was more of a demand. To save time, I decided to ride home ahead of Mother, enter the house, grab my car keys and drive back to get her, and then go meet Dad. I viciously (Not!), rode back to the house. I went to the front door: locked. I went to the first side door: locked. I went to the third entrance: locked. Lastly, I noticed that the screen door to the laundry was open. I entered and it was open, thank god. I went to exit through the laundry into the main lounge room to find that that door was locked.

I thought back to the comment, “Don’t lock all the doors, mum.” Clearly Mother was in her Habit Energy, one that proved annoying at this point but was clearly forgivable. I walked back out onto the street to await her return and started to feed the neighbour’s horse. A few minutes later Mother drew closer to the farmhouse. We opened the house. I grabbed my keys, messaged Father that we were on our way, and we took off towards the Antique shop.

Since we were in a rush, I had placed my phone into my trouser pocket and didn’t plug it into the car charger which was connected to the Bluetooth. So, on the way I missed a call from Father. Once we arrived 10 minutes later at the Antique shop, we noticed that Dad’s bright blue ute wasn’t parked out the front of the store. We then received a message on family chats that he was already on the way back to the farmhouse. He had received help to lift the table onto the ute before we arrived. Mother and I had left our walk, changed our plans, to then drive into town, only to be told we were not needed. Even though we had our mishaps from time to time and took our stresses out on each other, we worked damn well as a family unit. One that loved each other very much through troubles and triumphs.

## 7. A Loving Family

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Our family's love wasn't based on our religion, our career paths or our sexuality. No, our family love came from the heart, and with that love was an acceptance of your true being, whether that be a flamboyantly cis man or a weird hippie environmentalist who smoked too much pot. Our blood was stronger than any other family, no matter how stained others viewed it. This is reflected in the way my mother and father supported my sister and I no matter what endeavours we chose to explore. My mother was Christian, as well as my sister, while Father and I took a more outward approach towards science and atheism. Then add in the fact you have a gay son; you think sparks would fly around the room like a Harry Potter scene where someone just cast a spell with their wand. I guess you could say, "You can't choose your family, but you can choose to love them no matter who they are." I was just lucky enough to receive such a heart-driven family, one I could never live without.

When you are brought up, you know in your own heart whether you are loved or not loved. It's almost like a sixth sense, a sort of soul that surrounds you and projects onto you from the family that raises you. I always knew I was loved. My mother was beyond affectionate, always giving us a morning hug when we woke, dropping us to and from school every day with no complaints. My father, while just as loving and affectionate, was more analytical in his raising technique.

The only distance that started to grow between us was when my younger paranoid self believed that my parents would not accept me as a gay man. So, I put up a front, or a wall. I was hardly ever home, and when I was, I was distant and cold in the fear that if I spoke my mind or told a story the obvious would be out in the air. I threw myself into my full-time work, mostly to fuel my alcohol

and partying needs. The rest of my time was spent doing a full-time degree at Macquarie Uni, or hanging out with multiple different groups of friends, doing not much of anything.

I was always a bit fem; most of my childhood was spent with my mother and my sister, where we usually played the girls' games my sister wanted to play. I enjoyed the pink Barbie cars and dolls, but I also loved my Game Boy and toy trucks. I loved to dress up, and I have many happy memories of parading around in my mother's stockings, dresses and heels. I don't believe the shit about mothers making their sons gay, but I think future fem gays are more open to exploring their feminine side as children. I was lucky I had a mother that allowed me to explore this side of myself without judgment. Dad was also part of the family, but he was simply around a lot less. He worked tirelessly to support us and allow us to have the privileged upbringing that we had, but this meant working late nights and many weekends. Ironically, my father being a particularly stereotypical masculine man, meant his work took him away from the home more, and I had less regular contact with masculinity than femininity. So, if any balance was missing in my life, it was masculine influence. He was there, just less on a day to day basis than my mother was. My mother could be strict, but you always knew she was on your side. The empathy was visible in everything she did. In a way this encouraged me to explore my masculinity as the de facto man about the house in my father's absence.

Father was an only child and was used to being the centre of attention. However, Grandma had always been strict on him, or so he said, when he was younger. I think he was just jealous that grandma treated us like royalty when we went over for lunch or had sleepovers. Movies, Ice cream for breakfast, you name it: what dad was never allowed during his upbringing, was now our gain for the taking. Grandma was acting like a true Grandmother, spoiling us left, right and centre.



# Powerless

## 8. Grandma

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I never gave my Grandma enough respect to discover the person she truly was. I was 19 when she died, but I never gave two hoots about her in those last 5 years.

I used to idolise my grandmother like nothing else. She used to give us supper treats (so fucking British). Which was usually a tea and some chocolate biscuits. Grandma allowed us to watch a few episodes of The Vicar of Dibley before bedtime, which was still 7.30 because our parents were quite conservative. Grandma abided by those rules, but not the rules about giving us ice-cream for breakfast or letting us eat too much, even when I was already a chubby gay boy. I knew that Grandma saw that I was gay: probably why she allowed me to be happy in those early years because she knew it was only going to get harder as I grew older.

I wish she was still here. It's funny how you miss things that are gone, but don't appreciate them when you do have them. I look back now as an adult and see those little acts of kindness she bestowed upon me. It's a part of history you never understand or get to inquire more about, because once that epiphany is found later on in life, it is already lost to fix. But you have to believe, in every part of your heart, that you still have that love within your soul from that cherished one.

*“When you walk, for whom do you walk? All our ancestors and all future generations are present in us. Liberation is not an individual matter. As long as the ancestors in us are still suffering, we cannot be happy, and we will transmit that suffering to our children and their children.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Suicide is a hard-subject matter, one a lot of people are divided on. Should we discuss the topic, or should we sweep it under the rug? Does discussion cause more problems, or more awareness? The fact is, whether it does or doesn't, we can't just ignore it!

Over the years of losing the things she loved, Grandma became more withdrawn. She was always loving towards Gaia and I and spoiled us rotten. Sometimes we could be little shits, but Grandma always gave us treats or what we wanted.

As Grandma grew older, she became more depressed and withdrawn. She shut herself indoors knitting to the end of days or spent hours in the garden to avoid her abusive husband.

Grandma introduced me to Marry Poppins, Get Smart and a lot of other literature and movies where the lady was the prominent figure, and smarter than the man protagonist. Grandma imbued that truth upon me. Grandma was smarter than everyone around her, and in acting so people thought she was aggressive for having her own informative opinion as a woman.

Grandma committed suicide in March 2007.

That sunny morning Grandma had made her choice; it was the day she was going to end her life. She awoke as the sun rose as usual. She drove herself down to Richmond, a good 30 minutes from her house in Bilpin, and left Grandad at home. She parked the car a few streets back knowing she would not be returning to it. She slowly walked over to Aldi and headed to the road crossing she had used so many times before. The sun was still only low in the sky and was directly in line with the cars on the road that led up to the crossing. As Grandma stood at the crossing waiting for her fate, a car rapidly approached, the driver running late for work. Grandma waited until it was too late for the car to stop and stepped out onto the road.

I was sitting in my geography lecture at Macquarie Uni. When I left the lecture, I had 9 missed calls and 9 voicemails from Mum. I knew something was up. As soon as I listened to the voicemail Mum explained that Grandma had been hit by a car and was in ICU at Nepean Hospital, a good 2 hours from where my Uni was located. I got to my car and started to drive.

Once I arrived, I was met by my sister and mother. Grandma had severe swelling of the brain and they had to cut some of her skull out to release the pressure. When the car hit Grandma, she had landed directly on her head causing possible brain damage.

Grandma had a specific plan in place, written by a solicitor in the case of an accident or event where she might incur permanent brain damage. It stated that her life support was to be shut off. Grandma did not want to return to a world with any permanent or severe brain damage. A week later all signs indicated that Grandma would never wake again. The machines were turned off, and she died later that day. We lost an extraordinary woman: one I will never forget to be inspired by.

Then, when Granddad, Dad and Mother were emptying the stores of wool, canned goods and chocolate that Grandma liked to hoard from Aldi, they came across a hidden notebook inside a bag of various wools. Mother slipped it into her pants to avoid raising attention. Later, she showed Father the book's contents — the last confessions by a brilliant woman, of a soul broken by the long-term abuse of her alcoholic husband, my grandfather.

Grandmother had written of the mental abuse that Grandfather subjected her to, becoming an abusive alcoholic early in their marriage. JD was his vice. The little black book became a symbol, a symbol that if I was not careful, I would end up hurting my family.

*“Buddha was not a god. He was a human being like you and me, and he suffered just as we do. If we go to the Buddha with our hearts open, he will look*

*at us, his eyes filled with compassion, and say, because there is suffering in your heart, it is possible for you to enter my heart.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Suffering connected us, our pain rooted in genetics and history. I too became anxious depression driven, I followed the footsteps of our family's dark past, unknowingly as a teen. Only to be enlightened and disturbed when my Grandmother took her life, was this her cry for help, was this a warning

## 9. Anorexia Sucks

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*“If you don’t know the practice of mindfulness, you will allow yourself to be burned and destroyed by anger. You will suffer and those around you will suffer as well.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Not being much of a tea drinker, I need to adapt the usual metaphors to suit my sparkling individuality. Some of you, my dear readers, will find my perspectives on some things a little rough, a little jarring, or a little shocking. I’m old enough now to know that I can’t be everyone’s cup of long island iced tea and am no longer interested in constantly conversationally ducking and weaving to present myself as a cup of tea simply because that’s what someone else wants. I am a long island iced tea, not a cup of earl grey. This is my version of a trigger warning. If you want earl grey, and continue to read and find yourself triggered, quite frankly that’s on you, dear. For those of you who have not picked up on the subtle signs so far, I will spell it out for you.

I have always had self-image **issues**, and with that comes the inevitable **issues** with depression and the sometimes-confronting coping mechanisms. I’m a bit of a self-taught expert in unhealthy coping mechanisms. To paraphrase Dr Phil because I cannot be fucking bothered finding the video on YouTube and directly quoting him “People do what works, even if it seems dysfunctional. On some level it is meeting a need.”

My occasional snark is a suit of armour. My drinking is a retreat from my worries, and my anorexia was a way to control a world that felt out of my own control. For a time in my youth I was a portly young lad. My ill-thought-out solution to this problem was anorexia. I lost 3 kilos, so from a physical perspective anorexia was the answer my young mind was looking for, but the

older, wiser me now sees it was less about weight and more about fear and anxiety.

Anorexia gave me a physical focus for my pain and was an outward manifestation of my feelings of helplessness at the time. Mental Illness does something to you; it makes you incredibly good at seeing these signs in others. Before you argue with me, I'm not saying mentally ill people are always going to be your hero when you are hurting.

When you are ill you lash out and focus in. You can't help anyone, let alone yourself. I'm saying it's a primal understanding. As a broken person, I can recognise another broken person as one of the tribe. I can spot cut mark scars on your arm from across the room. Ten minutes at the dinner table with you, and I will know if you have issues with food. I can recognise a fellow hurting person.

There's every defence for the following story; it makes me human. I was young at the time, and just because I recognised the situation for what it was doesn't mean I had the skills or ability to deal with it.

I had a job working at the local cinema. Ella started a few months after me, in early 2008. Boy was she gorgeous, tall, thin, and always wore lots of makeup. My Spidey sense knew that she was hurting, I knew she had an eating disorder as surely as I knew the sun would rise in the morning. But like monkeys we are dickheads in our youth, and we were all bitches towards Ella.

We saw Ella's vulnerability and preyed on it. Ella's make-up was her armour against the world. She caked that shit on, so naturally we called her cake face, an underserving name, for an underserving woman, had she lived. Every moment of this recount makes me look back at myself, and realise how shitty we, and I, can be as humans, yet we still do it.

A nasty double slur against a girl whose illness would never allow her to eat cake, and who felt so ugly that she needed to hide her face behind so much

make-up that drag queens would tell her to tone it down. In time Ella and I bonded the way fellow tribe people do, the siren song of a fellow tribe's person who just fucking gets it is too strong to resist.

Not having to explain to each other why you never ate during the day, why you sometimes binged on food, why you drank to oblivion. When you look like the happiest person on the dance floor who is probably dying inside, there's a reassurance in the not having to explain yourself to others.

There's a safety in not having to justify your dysfunctions, not feeling judged. It takes a lot of energy to hide that kind of thing from the rest of the world. Being around Ella was easy because I wasn't spending all of my energy hiding who I was and how much I was hurting.

I only knew Ella for 9 months before I lost her. She lost the battle against her demons, and to this day I still miss my beautiful broken friend. To make a fucking horrific situation even more horrific, a friend of ours who had just joined the police force was the one to discover her body. At the time, the cinema staff were a tight-knit group of broken misfits. We had formed a tribe of broken people, lost in our youth, trying our darnedest to help each other along. Blind leading the blind, we drank together and confided in each other. The shock-waves of Ella's death were too much for our tribe to survive.

Life had become too much for my fragile friend; I understand that on a level I wish I didn't. But her death also stole from me, not only my friend, but my tribe, my ability to get through the days, and my hope.

If beautiful Ella's life was not worth living, what hope was there for the rest of us? Ella's death was the first time someone I loved had died. I turned to alcohol, sex and all the other self-destructive clichés.

Death has a way of making us think about life, its meaning, its purpose, what we want from it. Suicide is contagious for this very reason. When we see

someone making that choice, we ask ourselves in our grief if it is the right choice for us also.

One day soon after, I woke up and decided it was the right choice for me too. I went to the park with my friends and watched a game of rugby (rugby bums always make me happy and I wanted them to be part of my final day on Earth).

I spent a happy day laughing and talking. As illogical as it seems to those who have never been there, once you have decided to die it becomes quite important to have a happy ending, both to hide your plans from those around you, and because Disney has sucked us all in with its happy ending narrative. I don't know why it matters, but it does. You want to go out on a high note. Maybe it's a bit of a control thing, when the world is shit and out of control, deciding to die gives you back some kind of control. It allows you to decide the narrative, the ending to your story.

That day nothing really seemed relevant anymore. When people spoke, it was just random words that did not represent anything. In deciding to die, I found myself both living in the moment and watching the moment like a disinterested observer.

It's a hard place to describe, lost but with a clear direction. I went to a dinner party that night and we drank and reminisced, we spoke of our futures, a future I knew wouldn't exist for me but I had to keep up the lie so no one would find out my plans.

We are told that our future is a blank canvas, that we should paint it bright colours, dream big, make it fabulous. The reality is we are not the only ones painting our canvas, life is a mix of luck, hard work, serendipity and chance. Our stories are not ours alone, and this idea that they are is what leaves people feeling helpless when life throws shit at them.



Anorexia is a growing problem. We tell people they are in control of their lives, but a lot of the time, you are not. Anorexia is an attempt to take back control in a world that tells you control is possible.

As a society we lie about how much control you have over your life. It's the myth of the meritocracy that fuels this demon. If you are where you are based on merit, then when things are hard it's because it's your due.

Disney tells us in the end, good triumphs over bad; there's always a happy ending. When you are being crushed by life, you come to the conclusion you must be the bad guy, and the only way to bring about the happy ending is to bring about the ending.

My own ending, much like that great philosopher Aristotle, was going to be in a bath house with a razor. Like Elvis, I was going to end my days on the toilet. I cried for the future I couldn't have, but so desperately wanted.

My life really did flash before my eyes, I reminisced about the good and the bad, but in that lonely moment in the bathroom at a dinner party the bad outweighed the good.

I cut my wrists.

I knew that cutting across wouldn't cut it so to speak, so I cut lengthwise, to get the job done right. I was surprised at how little it hurt, and how you can calmly observe your last moments seemingly from outside of yourself.

Alcohol is an anti-coagulant, so I quickly started to bleed quite heavily. Unable to escape my youthful need for people to think well of me, I climbed into the bath so there would be no unnecessary mess for others to clean up. I would like to say it was about consideration for others, but it was probably more about not wanting to be hated by my friends for leaving a mess for them to deal with.

Because I am writing this story you already know my attempt to die was unsuccessful. I am now incredibly grateful that I wasn't successful. I suppose the point of this story is that the stories we tell ourselves and our children about life really do set the vulnerable among us up for these situations.

I still have the scars on my arms and the scars on my psyche from that day. I know what it's like to reach the place where dying feels like the answer, but I now also know that everything passes. You can't freeze frame the good moments so they never end, but equally the bad moments are not permanent either.

As a society we need to work harder to resist stigma. As a society we have to stop telling people they can control everything in their lives, and that we are a merit-based society; if your life is shit you earned that shit.

Because Disney is an insidious cult that creeps into our unconscious like a pervert hiding in the bushes with a pair of binoculars, wang firmly in hand, watching you through the crack in your curtains, I feel compelled to add a happy ending to this story.

I was once a portly young chappie of 120kgs with the arse of a Kardashian, and the future felt hopeless. Fast forward 10years and I am now the stunning specimen you see before you. A

delightful, dysfunctional fellow with some life experience under my belt, a gift for a story, and a kick-arse editor. My Kardashian arse is now my finest feature and brings all the men to the yard (Not boys, I'm a classic sassy bottom so if you are a masculine top my contact details will be in the author biography).

It gets worse, but fortunately life gets better too. So, for all of you chubby young mo-fo-homos out there thinking that ending it all is the answer, remember the hero of this tale was once where you are, yet today he is the magnificent specimen you see before you. #IfICanYouCanToo #Motivation

## 10. Ella

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*"To oppose, brush aside, or deny pain in our body or mind, only makes that feeling more intense."*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

It was after the death of Ella that we started to drink a lot more. There were reoccurring events to commemorate her life and death, and to let the vulgar gossipers do what they do. After Ella's death, the cinema organised a few work drinks at a pub down the road to talk about the good memories that Ella had shown us. During this night, our area manager Chris was more than a caring boss. He had a newborn at home, but made the effort to turn up, join in for a beer, and share a laugh of the girl that Ella once was.

Ella and I had had our fair share of car accidents; we were just prone to them. We bonded over the fact that we both had Hyundai Excels, both manual, but mine was a dark green and hers a dark maroon. My Excel was a little less tragic than hers, as in, my rear-view mirror wasn't blue-tacked to the front screen of the car. What I lacked in mirror structure, I gained in dents from head to toe of the car's outer panels. Ella was on the phone to me one afternoon as we were planning on going out that evening, Ella was driving down New Line road and was distracted by a hot guy that was walking down the adjacent footpath. All of a sudden, I heard a loud bang, followed by a "Oh Shit!" Ella had run up the back of the car in front of her while perving on the hot guy. Lucky for her, he ran over to check if she was ok. Her mirror had flung off the front windscreen and ploughed into her face during the crash. She quickly blue-tacked it back to its original position, exchanged licences and was on her merry way, Ella was never phased by the little things in life. That's why I loved her so much.

Ella would tie a rope around her neck later that year.

Ella and I shared a bond, and that bond also extended to Blake.

## 11. Blake the Broken

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*“Fear of the unexpected leads many people to live a constricted and anxious life.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Blake was a part of the cinema crew, entwined within our group before Ella committed suicide. Blake had a way about him. Even though we all knew he was slightly fucked up, he had this endearing mojo about him, that made you just want to rip off his clothes, like Austin Powers. In a bad way, and a great way. Like a constant choke hold over others.

Blake wasn't super attractive, nor was he ugly, just that type of guy you probably wouldn't notice until you did. He was slightly balding even though he was in his early 20s, drank far too much and was entitled more than me. His Mum and Dad were both psychologists or psychopaths. They did a royally good job at fucking him up.

Blake was fucked up in a lot of ways, and rightfully so. So naturally he would join in on our drunken endeavours. When we were at work, I would be the supervisor in the Box Office selling tickets, Blake would be the supervisor on the floor, and Ella would be the supervisor of the candy bar. So, when we all finished work most nights together, we would hit up the local pub and get fucked up.

Once Ella had died, the dynamic team sort of just fell apart, Blake became more internalised with his pain. The death of Ella broke him; it broke all of us. We continued our usual drinking habits, just not with each other. There were a few times we linked in arms again but mostly we just texted and kept up to date at work.

I had always joked around with Blake about sleeping with him, he had a large dick and wasn't afraid of showing it to people. The jokes became more real when he started to send me pictures of him nude in the shower, videos of him jerking off and so forth. I mean, I didn't mind one bit, but I found it odd that he was showing off to a gay guy who respected his boundaries. He never asked me for any back, so it seemed more of a show or voyeur thing. I thought the videos and pictures were more a cry for help than anything, but then he started ringing at all times of the night, saying he was in a gutter, messed up, and his mental state started to deteriorate more erratically.

After the loss of Ella, the idea of suicide had become a lot more real, so I took him under my wing and almost became his probation/ driving officer. I would pick him up drunk and vomiting still lying in the gutter from where he had rung me, at all times of the night, but when enough was enough he just wouldn't listen.

The last time I picked him up, we were close to his home, Blake grabbed my dick while I was driving, I nearly ran off the road I was in so much shock. We had never done anything physical like that before.

I removed his hand from my package and told him to keep his hands to himself while I was driving. He again lent over and started to rub my dick with a forceful intensity and tried to kiss me.

I nearly ran off the road and had to pull over and lay down the law that nothing was ever going to transpire between us. I dropped him home and the next day he denied doing any of the actions he had forcefully pushed upon me. He was clearly embarrassed. Blake had become a drug addict, an alcoholic, while also feeling shameful about his true being. Another friend lost in the world that had been so cruel to him throughout the years.

# Eliminate

## 12. Lives Still Being Destroyed

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*“Anger has the power to burn and destroy.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

I became more of an alcoholic during my period at DHM. This was well after the cinema and before the hospital. I worked at DHM from 2015 to 2018. Most things could set me off, and once I had the wines running, the smokes going, anything could happen. It was on this day, halfway into my working time at DHM, that some major shit went down. So, I rang Buddy, my lover and guidance counsellor, so she could calm me down before I planted a bomb at head office. At least I could listen to things that made a little more sense due to my jump-the-gun nature.

We were on the piss for a good two and half hours chatting on the phone, I threw out the silly idea that I could get an uber to Buddy's, and then head out together to Greenwood to meet Tye.

Buddy stupidly replied with a yes, we all needed to let off steam. The shit that was going down at DHM involved Emma and I, while Buddy was on the outside advising. This is what happened.

There is a place down in Mona vale that has 5 collection rooms, which only requires 5 staff to man, plus a receptionist. But because David Brent is a complete fuck wit, she had put 10 staff on shift. We were exceedingly busy that day, however we looked like we weren't doing anything as half the staff were standing around, waiting for a room. So, I suggested we double up, become teams, one enters the details and checks them on the computers, while the other bleeds the patient to make it more efficient.

This was against company policy, but we all did it from time to time to work through the queues. It was beneficial to the patients; no one wants to wait an hour for blood test. Emma and I decided to man up together, even though we never really worked well together. Emma never liked my shortcuts, even though they were very effective; she believed she was better than that.

I set up the equipment and the tubes for Emma, I however misread one of the tests and forgot to put in a dedicated tube that we had needed. Andy, a pathetic 52-year-old that worked with us who was a gambler and liar, had sent the same patient away prior. Andy believed that this Malaria test was time sensitive, however there are two types of Malaria tests, depending on how the doctor has written it on the referral. Andy, being the moron, believed it was the urgent Malaria testing and had told this patient to return 30 mins prior to the courier. He was wrong.

Once the patient had left Emma and I, we realized we had logged into Felicity's account on the computer as she had left it logged in on the monitor. Now we were in double shit. I convinced Emma that we would just write on the referral that we had taken the dedicated tube, tubes got lost on the way to the lab all the time, so it wouldn't be too suspicious if this tube had gone missing. We wrote it down and put the specimens into the spin room. We however did not know at this stage that Andy was waiting for this patient to come back and asked the receptionist who had taken her in, he then went through the courier bag and pulled out the specimens to see there was no dedicated red EDTA taken, in front of all the patients he started shouting it out at the top of his lungs, super profesh Andy.

Felicity then decided to get involved. She always had weird interactions with Andy, and I wouldn't put it past her that they were probably fucking on the down-low. She even invited him over to Christmas lunch, and when her husband couldn't attend a holiday they had booked, she took Andy instead.

I took charge and grabbed the specimen bag and told Andy and Felicity we would fix it; however, Felicity had also noticed that we had done it on her log in. It was at this stage David Brent walked in on all the mayhem and she asked me to explain what was going on, I told her Felicity was overreacting (which she was) and that I accidentally had used her log in and now I was going to ring centre bench and change it over to my login.

Luckily for me, David Brent had used my login for a “group and hold,” which was a serious procedure, a few weeks prior and had to confess, so David Brent wasn’t going to punish Emma & me for a mistake that David had already made himself. He told me to swap it over and that would be that.

David Brent left, Andy was being a douche still yelling out about the tube, and Felicity decided to cry and make it about her because that’s what she does best. Naturally everyone had an idea that we had fucked up somehow, so it was going to get out one way or another. I rang Centre Bench and the woman advised me that the test could still be taken from another tube we had already collected. Simple, that should have been the end of that right?

DHM's problem however was they knew that Emma and I were in the same room, so they decided to investigate because Felicity and Andy had made such a fuss about it. An internal investigation was launched, and they decided they wanted a formal hearing, separately with me, and one with Emma. Emma and I needed to get our story straight, I decided since I made the choice to lie about the tube, I would say I started the procedure from beginning to end and Emma was just watching and helping where she could as we were over staffed. Even though Emma had done the bleed, why I ever covered for her I don't know.

I sat at the round table with David Brent, Napoleon, Bella and the head of HR. A useless and moronic bitch. I sat at the table, Bella spread out various pages of screen shots from E-Collect, the system we use to log everything with 3 separate referrals of the patient we had collected blood from. They asked for



my recount, Bella stated that she believed I was lying. She didn't understand why the red EDTA marker had been marked on the referral, then crossed out.

It was, "Burn the witch at the stake," as soon as the meeting begun. I won't bore you with the rest of the stupid details, but I got out of it because of some surprising advice from Napoleon. I had had the ass cyst during these stages, and as I was on heavy medication to subside the pain, Napoleon told me before the meeting if things went sideways to say I was on prescription medication, that I probably made a mistake, and I was willing to take the repercussions for that, but this was the first time in a year I had ever even made a mistake.

Bella knew I was lying (takes a cunt to know a cunt), but she couldn't completely prove it, so I had to return for retraining and was a second-class citizen within the company from then on.

### 13. Being Blind

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*"Nothing to attain."*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Prior to my move down South, my raging drinking problem during my work period at the hospital took a spin for the worse. There is always a night when you are on the piss that you are still able to surprise yourself by doing something so stupid that you thought it was incapable of doing.

Yet somehow, it still occurs. At the ripe age of 31, I finally hit my stupid filter. Not only did I hit it, I rammed it so fucking hard up the scale I broke the poor thing.

I had gone to Mother and Father's for our usual weekly Sunday night dinner. I went over at 3.30 in the afternoon to catch some summer balcony sun and drink a few wines before Dad and Gaia arrived from work at 5pm. I was running out of material for my travel book, so I decided that I would include my parents' travels around Australia. I smashed my first bottle of white wine before Father and Gaia arrived, and we got a good 2000 words written.

It was at this moment that Selena and Kesha messaged me to come around for some dinner and wine. Selena was a new piss friend, a girl from work that I decided to befriend, or rather she befriended me. It was a mutual thing, I promise, but like most 24/7 jobs, we had the odd nights or days off.

To my excitement Selena and Kesha lived not far from Mum and Dad, just up at Collaroy Plateau in fact. I drove up, stopped at the grog shop on the way and grabbed another 2 bottles of red.

I stayed a few hours, because the girls both had work the next day. So, I decided to drive home, which wasn't far. I don't condone drink driving at all,

but when you just need to drive down the hill to get to your house, I feel like it may be safer than being so intoxicated and trying to walk when there are no Ubers around, to then get hit by a car and die; or attacked by a pack of murderous possums. Trust me, it's happened before. So, the logical way to get home was to get in that barrier of a car with 4 walls, and drive home, in the safety of airbags and air conditioning.

We lived in a battle-axe. For those of you who don't know what a battle-axe is, it's simply a house behind a house. The entrance to the house is a shared driveway that goes all the way up, next to the first house. The driveway is only thick enough to fit one car and leads up to an open carpool and garage area.

We lived below our landlords, who never had kids, but had two whippet dogs that they treated like their kids. The day those dogs die it will be horrendous for them, devastation to the highest amount. They fed them organic chicken and took them out for walks twice a day, sunrise and sunset. They are, as you would say, their everything. People who show affection to animals, any animal that puts their trust in the beholder, gets a big fucking yes from me.

Chris and Yuan used the driveway more often than not. It wasn't a problem, we just parked on the nearby street. The street was not lit up by many streetlights. The house was not close to the road. The residents parked like absolute fuck wits, a space that could easily fit two small cars was taken up by one smaller car.

You imagine what is readily available driving up that dark dank street to find the closest spot, especially when you are drunk and bored. I spotted one as I drove up. It was one of those spots that could fit two cars but was pushing it. I pulled up in front of the car and exited.

I awoke to a "No caller ID on my phone, so I didn't answer, but what was odd was that this no caller ID left a voicemail. I decided that because it was now 10.30am I would check the voicemail, just in case I was meant to be at work.

We had had a roster that was released 4 times that week with different set shifts. I was confused from the outset. I rang the 101- voicemail indicator and listened; this is what I heard.

“Hi, this is constable Davis from Dee Why police station. I've just received a phone call that you are blocking someone's driveway, if you could please give me a call back on 1800 333 555.”

I started shitting myself instantly. I pulled my jeans up from my ankles, ripped the C-PAP machine from my face, shoeless, and started to walk down the driveway with my car keys to see what I had done.

I had awakened into a new world. I had no memory of what I had done last night besides the fact I knew I had dinner with Mum and Dad. I ran down the driveway trying to remember where I had parked the night before. When I got to the driveway where my car was, I stood in awe, embarrassed and ashamed. The car was not just slightly over the driveway. No, the car was parked completely over the driveway, no access in or out. It's like I just decided, “Hey, this looks good enough, I'm parking here.” That's my natural thought process, but I would never actually do it.

The utter shame. I was surprised that the car had not been towed away on a Tuesday morning at 10.30 am. To make things even worse the constable had stated I had parked in front of 86 Delmar parade, which rang a bell. Why did it ring a bell? Because that was my roommate's plumber's address. Not only had I been a complete fuckwit, I had parked in front of someone I was connected to! I was so embarrassed I got in the car and pulled out so quick I nearly crashed it, I had to move it! They had my number plate, which they gave to the police to find my registration so they could identify and find me to move the car in future. If I parked it anywhere near 86, which was close to my house, they would look at me as an example of defiance and stupidity.

I went to get Maccas, to decide during my absence where the best place to avoid any eye contact would be. I parked the car 4 streets over and walked home. It's been 3 weeks now, and I refuse to park it anywhere on Delmar or the side street. The inconvenience for my drunken stupidity is still funny, but being a lazy cunt, it's just god damn inconvenient. I was now scared of parking anywhere near Delmar Heights.

*“Walking is as simple as putting one foot in front of the other. But we often find it difficult or tedious. We drive a few blocks rather than walk in order to “save time.” When we understand the inter-connections of our bodies and our minds, the simple act of walking like the Buddha can feel supremely easy and pleasurable.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

## 14. Delmar Heights

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*“The basic issue is our practice of peace, our practice of looking deeply. First of all, we need to allow ourselves to calm down. Without tranquillity and serenity, our emotions, anger, and despair will not go away.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

The street of Delmar where we used to live was always considered to be a pretentious place, and so being, the residents there believe they are super important people. They're not. My neighbour who lives directly next door (as a neighbour does) has a balcony that is parallel to ours, one meter away, covered by a large tree.

Back in the day when Paul and I first moved in, we would have constant chats on the balcony during summer times about anal sex and anything else that could be considered utterly and completely vulgar. So, our neighbour, let's call him Frank, righteous and Christian, obviously has always been a narcissistic cunt.

There was a knock at the door. I answered. Frank was an old podgy German-looking goatee fuck face that had too many worries in his life, rather than focusing on the retirement that he should have been enjoying. Everything that he shouldn't have focused on was now at the forefront of his focus. Problems were his thing. Creating them was like making a shopping list with 100 items on it: a basket to be filled with Halloween treats that Frank thrived on. I answered, leaning against the door so he couldn't just push past and walk in.

He said, “I'm sorry, but the conversation's you are having on your balcony are completely inappropriate, and my wife and I do not wish to listen to them.”

My natural response was, “Oh god, I'm so sorry, I didn't realise you had to listen to them. Did you ever think about going inside and not eavesdropping on others' conversations, or did you just feel the need to sit there and listen so you could come up and complain to me? Clearly you are homophobic.”

Frank looked at me stunned, then huffed off like the fat child he was. Naturally we changed the conversation and hyped the vulgar to extreme.

From then on, Frank watched me like a hawk. He would listen for when we left the house and head down the stairs just to awkwardly walk past me on the street. I'd say good morning to Frank but get no reply, Frank was up to something, and I knew it. I mean we can burn each other's houses down and still say good morning to each other, right? That's just being polite.

One dark and treacherous night I parked over the neighbour's driveway, slightly, like I'm talking 10cm max here. I had backed up so far to the car behind me that I couldn't get any closer. Frank comes and knocks at my door saying that he will report me unless I move my car. It wasn't Frank's driveway. Frank didn't have a driveway, he just hated me that much that he had decided to learn my number plate.

Frank was waiting for me to fuck up, Frank walked up the battle-ax driveway and up the 30 stairs, to knock on my door, and give his opinion that never mattered. Frank wanted to prove something I never gave two fucks about.

## 15. Wood of the Green

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*"We have to know that each word, each thought, each of our actions carries our signature."*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

I didn't really start drinking, or binge drinking until I was 19, when I met my "Uni crowd." My first run in with alcohol probably should have turned me off for life (It didn't. It was only a year's time before I got back on the band wagon.) Chloe, Eden and I had decided to go to Greenwood on a Thursday night to seal the new "Uni friendship."

The plan was that we would all meet up at The Metro, this cool dive bar in North Sydney, get ourselves silly drunk, then head over to the Greenwood that usually housed the new 16-year-olds. The security wasn't very tight, and it was always well known to have underage people there, so being 19 was pushing it. On entrance we knew if we dressed slutty enough and were drunk enough, they wouldn't care about letting us in, and luckily, we all looked younger than we actually were.

Since I was an unseasoned drinker, I hadn't even had one drink before arriving at The Metro. Chloe was shocked. Naturally I had no idea what to order, because I hadn't really had a drink at a bar before, besides trying wine or beer with the rents, which I detested at the time.

So, naturally Chloe started me off on something to ease me into the night. The bitch got me 4 tequila sunrises. Boy did they taste good, and you couldn't taste the alcohol, which was smothered with the orange juice and grenadine. We were downing rounds like there was no tomorrow over a period of two hours. Then we stood up, I had no idea how drunk I was, it was a feeling I had never experienced before, being out of control, yet feeling adventurous and stupid at



the same time. We somehow stumbled over to the Greenwood, which was just up the hill, and made it into the cesspool that it was.

We decided to get some shots to kick off the already ongoing night. Somehow within the first twenty minutes of arrival, Eden, Chloe and I all lost each other. Greenwood isn't necessarily the biggest place, but it's like a rabbit warren, with interconnecting rooms, an outside area off the back and toilets upstairs. It would be very easily to miss each other or pass each other without even noticing, unless maybe you weren't drunk.

I had run off to the toilet, Eden was trying to find another friend, and Chloe has no recollection of what she was doing. In a matter of seconds, I fell violently ill and knew I needed to projectile vomit. I wasn't going to make it through the crowd, up the stairs, then wait in a queue for the bathroom, I needed an out now. I found a mystery back door that led out into a courtyard, it was perfect to do the deed. I vomited everywhere. Everything I had just drunk for the past few hours came back up like Niagara Falls. I tried to get back in, but the door had locked from the inside behind me, and as I looked around, I saw the gated courtyard. Not just any kind of gated courtyard, gated as in a 2-meter-high gate with spikes on top. There was no escape, unless you wanted to re-enact the Virgin Suicides.

I was royally fucked, not just in the sense I was half British. I was just completely and utterly fucked. I couldn't leave the scene of the crime, it was obvious I had done it, and there was no exit or entry in sight. However, there was a bench which I lay down on and started to vomit again. At this stage I went into a drunken coma and was unable to right myself.

The next minute I was having a light flashed into my eyes by a paramedic and was inside an ambulance. My first thought was fuck, I can't afford to pay for this. I said "No, no, I'm fine. Let me out. I don't want to go to hospital," and

then I passed back out. At this point 4 hours of my life went missing until I woke up in the hospital bed in utter shock.

I had a drip in my arm, vomit all over myself, with 85 missed calls and plenty of messages. Half of them were from Chloe, and the other half from my Mother. It was now 4.30am, and I should have been home by now, especially on a Thursday night.

I needed to pee beyond belief, so I got up out of my hospital bed and made it to the bathroom that was halfway down the hall, my drip was annoying me, and I thought it was a good idea just to rip it out. I couldn't stand to pee and ended up just sitting on the floor as I started to bleed out from the cannula I had just removed. Lucky for me I had left the door half open in my drunken state and it wasn't long before a nurse found me in a pool of blood. She was not happy!

I had made a big, bloody mess. The nurse got me up in her anger, rightfully so, with a security guard, shoved me back into the bed, told me to clean myself up and leave. The taxi I ordered was not impressed by the state I was in, I smelled like vomit and looked like utter shit. It was at this stage I messaged my Mum to say I was ok, and now on the way home.

I grabbed a vomit bag from reception to take with me, as I was still feeling pretty worse for wear. The nurse said I probably wouldn't need it, as they had already pumped my stomach. I looked at them confused. We were crossing the Harbour Bridge from the hospital on our way home when I vomited again into the bag. The taxi man seemed worried now.

Mother was waiting out the front of our old Cherrybrook family home. She paid the taxi man and walked me to my room. I thought I was going to be in deep shit, but she tucked me into bed and said we would discuss it later. It took me 3 days in bed to recover from alcohol poisoning. I had learnt my lesson, and

I had learnt it hard. When I tried to drink any liquor after that, the smell made me gag straight away

From this point I was sober for a full year. I drove all my friends and attended events completely sober and anxiety ridden.

# Meditation

## 16. Death at a Funeral

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This was not the case years later. During my time at Delmar Heights, still working part time for DHM that sadly my Nana passed away from her long battle with dementia. A sweet loving woman, and not trying to be sexist, but honestly made the best potato salad I have ever tasted, and of course she gave great cuddles.

The story started the day before the funeral.

You know those friends that seem like they're really cool people, that come into your life and make it less shitty for a while. You become closer, then they just move on with their lives. Sarah and Ed were those people; they had goals, they had dreams, they had things to do, and I applaud them for doing such things. Moving on and having a life however doesn't mean everything else just subsides into nothing.

Sarah was a beautiful, blonde. She had an aura of life around her, and she hid her anxiety well. Ed was lucky enough to meet her and fall in love with her. They radiated the epitome of a great couple. They were in love, they had fun, they smoked, they drank, they did what they wanted, because they could, and they loved doing it. When I moved down to Dee Why, they took Paul and I in as friends.

One night, before my Nana's funeral, all the hot boys, including Ed, were invited to a games night at Sarah and Ed's new pad. I took 6 bottles of Rosé as Sarah and I were used to polishing off at least 3 bottles most nights when together.

Paul and I were kicked out fairly early. We were smoking drunk on the short trip home, when suddenly we saw a trolley. It was the trolley of death.

Paul suggested that he get in it and I push him around. We obviously weren't the smartest back then, both in our 30s and still getting in trolleys on a drunken summer's night.

While trying to drive the trolley I ran into a post box that was about 2-foot-wide and 5 foot tall, because if you're going to hit something big, make sure you hit it right. There was no way in our drunken state that we could have possibly missed that huge red box.

We slammed into it at full force, the trolley bouncing back and the wheels running over my left foot with Paul's weight inside the trolley. I fell backwards, and the trolley tipped; we both rolled onto the ground crying and laughing.

We were in pain, but it was good pain. It was only when I stood up, I realised what damage I had actually done to my foot. I was also wearing flip flops. There was no blood drawn, the impact had been too quick, whatever I had done within minutes my foot was the size of a soccer ball and I could not bear weight on it, I was so drunk I didn't feel much pain, but when I awoke for the next morning to go to the funeral, things became dire.

I awoke early, because the Funeral was out in The Hills where I had grown up. My sister and I had decided to travel together as we both now lived on the beaches. I had offered to drive, I couldn't bail last minute because I stupidity broke my foot the night before, drinking to excess and slamming into a post box trolley ridden. It didn't quite the idea of prodigal grandson showing up for his Nana's funeral, hungover and broken. I slowly walked down my driveway, got to my car, grabbed my sister and we headed west. It took over an hour with traffic for the 10am funeral. I may have looked and smelled like death, but the rest of the family put it down to me being upset, which I was.

Death had become a common occurrence amongst our family, on both sides. Pa first in 2006, Grandma in 2007, followed by my uncle a few years later. Then in 2014, my only cousin, Craig, died of a heart attack after he had already endured two years of Cancer. Followed by Nana in 2015.

Before Craig passed, he had a little boy with his wife. The wife and my second cousin were present at Nana's funeral. After the Memorial, we all gathered in the church hall next door for food and refreshments.

The real death of the party, however, was Craig's wife. The wife had always shown a certain distain towards the rest of the family. When my second cousin became unattended, I watched over him. He tripped. I caught the poor little guy before he slammed headfirst into the wooden floor. Bitch Face (the wife) came running over. Assuming I had caused the event to occur, she then scolded me, grabbing Jeremy

My body and Soul were clearly not in sync with the rest of my family that day. I was a disgrace to show up how I did. Yet luckily, I got away with my distasteful judgement, saving Jeremy and being respectful in the church I had so many arguments against.

I didn't take care of myself during this period at all. I drank like a fish, smoked like a chimney and partied like a raver. Whatever it could endure, I threw at it. My soul was out of whack, and so was my body. I was falling to pieces.

## 17. Body and Soul

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*“Our mind as well as our body needs to rest.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

During my café days, just after leaving the cinema, I became good friends with Dietrick. He was born over the Australia Day weekend, back in the late 80s. He liked to get fucked up. So did Christy, Sarah, Ed and the rest of the gang. We decided to hire some houseboats in Brooklyn. The plan was to drink all day, swim all day, and try to enjoy each other's company while completely fucked. The boats held around 8 people, or an 8 ball. I imagine now we would all receive \$1K fine, and rightfully so.

I had been sick for weeks with a sore throat. I never saw the problem with isolating myself on a boat with others, with no way to communicate to the shore. I only had a series of STI's living in my throat; it wasn't a disease that could kill.

Halfway through the boat experience, I had drunk and smoked to an excess, that I started to have breathing difficulties. The next morning my friends took me ashore in the dingy to attend a medical centre, in case I truly was dying. The doctor had no sympathy for me whatsoever. Diagnosing me with reoccurring tonsillitis, he gave me some Aspro Stop — which is like gargling salt water — and sent me home.

This throat situation started to occur every couple of weeks after our boating extravaganza. Shortly after the boating incident, I went to the dentist. He diagnosed me with a gum-eating bacteria. Which was entirely correct, He put me on this horrible medication, it made everything I ate taste like metal. I dropped weight of 20kgs, over a two-month period. When I finally moved to Dee Why I booked in with a new doctor, to see if my gum disease had been

cured and my throat was ok. My new doctor was thorough, within a week and after swabs and blood tests, he gave me a needle in my bum for my throat herpes. Not only did I have a gum eating bacteria, my throat was infected with gonorrhoea! Those poor dicks I had sucked, I really hope they never contracted that gum disease, if so, I owe them royalties. Hashtag sorry. (Don't worry, gum disease doesn't work like that, every cock I sucked is still healthy and ready to penetrate.)

Since my injection and medication for gum diseases, I was lucky enough not to have a throat infection ever again. Of course, it was a gay thing; how had I been so silly. When you put foreign objects down your throat constantly, you're sure to get some sort of infection. I learnt a lot that year. Always mouth wash and gargle after any gay foreign objects are used in one's throat. This then takes me to Finn, who I met mid 2019 in Bali on a vacation, I wanted to put his foreign object down me, but fate had other ideas for our relationship.



## 18. Finn

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I was working in the hospital for Clinical Labs at this point. I was starting a new role in the hospital in emergency as Admissions Officer, so a final trip to Bali in between jobs seemed like the right way to start things off.

I went to Bali with my long-life friend Taylor and my stupid gay bestie Ben. Ben was going to be over there the week prior for a vacay with his family, but shit got real when Ben's grandmother passed away a few days before. With funeral planning now the forefront of focus, the family trip was temporarily put on hold. No refunds were available for the trip, so they decided to put the funeral on hold instead and continue on their trip overseas. Then two days into the family trip, Ben's sisters' husband, who had stayed behind in Australia, got so fucked up with his mates one night that he fell on his head, slightly fracturing his skull. He had swelling of the brain and was put into an induced coma.

My plan was to fly over the week after, then Taylor would follow a few days later. We hired an Air BNB Villa for a reasonable price and split it between the three of us. It had a pool in the middle surrounded by the bedrooms and kitchen. It was halfway in between Seminyak and Legian, in a prime position a ten-minute walk to the gay clubs where we would most likely be going every night, and a ten-minute walk in the other direction towards the shops, cafes and quirky bars. There was no need for drunken motor bicycle rides from the locals to get home, or for getting robbed by the notorious cab men. Walking was going to be our new thing.

The driveway led down a few little alleys until you hit the accommodation. A café was just up the street. It was nothing fancy—they had juice, eggs, and the usual—but by god damn their coffee was amazing, so that's what kept taking us back. We prob should have ventured further, tried a few more cafes, but this one

was easy and cheap enough, just like me. The only problem with hungover breakfast is when you leave the café and you need to shit yourself or vomit, and you don't make it to where you are going, then projectile vomit all over these poor people's bikes, outside a shop front at 9am, with kids playing amongst the streets. You then have to walk past this business for the remainder of your trip, and boy do the Aussies stand out, especially when you're wearing your Uno themed singlet shirt, and short shorts with glaring blonde hair you just dyed the week before you left Australia.

The locals also get to see you struggling home from the gay clubs wearing the same horrendous outfit, because you're already sweaty and smoky, so you might as well turn up to the club like that too. Otherwise, you just waste a perfectly good outfit for the next day. Everyone you saw on Grindr that day would be at one of the 3 clubs that were lined up on Gay Street. You usually started on the right and made your way up to the left if you were facing the clubs, and in that order.

The first club was trying too hard but had the cheap drinks and an enclosed water capsule that had naked Asian men with their huge boners rubbing up against the walls while you drank. It was just a tease to get the night started. Once the cheap drinks were down you would move to No. 2 Bar. No. 2 was not where you would take a dump, you wouldn't want to take a dump in any of these places in fact, you'd be lucky enough to have a door, let alone a toilet, or toilet paper, most likely a hole in the floor. No. 2 was great because she was always busy, the drinks more expensive, but they had drag shows every night, and some of them were actually pretty good, I mean they only mimed to Rihanna, GaGa and Madonna, but please, when you're drunk and in a drag club, what else do you want to hear? You stayed here until about 11pm or even a little later. We even meet a straight bloke one night that offered to pay for our drinks if we came to Potato Head with him because he knew gays picked up girls.

Sadly, we never made it because we were so fucked over all the time, and he wasn't that hot so there wasn't much incentive besides the free drinks, and no one likes Potato Head anymore, it was just too pretentious.

Then, when the time was right, you would hit No.3 bar. The third club was the size of all three clubs put together. It was where you had to be at the end of the night. The music was more dancey, the filth came out, and it was the right time to hook up and get the night started on so many fronts. It was at this club we met Finn.

Finn was an attractive ringer, as in he had red hair, had a pretty good body, and dressed like a straight man. He ticked all the boxes. Ben was as drunk as he ever gets, as in he had too much champagne and was acting like a dick, which is actually god damn entertaining, while also falling over like a K'd up Britney Spears in Gimme Gimme More. It was at this stage I was about to take Ben home because he was getting noticed for his drunken state. I leant Ben up against a wall, spotted Finn by himself, and I knew I had to swoop in before anyone else did. He was in fact alone. I saw two desperate girls that "hang in the gay club", because they are slightly too chubby, and gays make them feel good. I asked them politely to be our friends then shoved Ben onto them, so I could check out this new dude who had just entered.

I approached like a gazelle in my drunken state, I thought I was more sober than Ben, because he was so drunk, yet in fact, I was nearly as inebriated. I stumbled across and since the club was so loud, I had to yell into Finn's ears to even try to have a conversation. It was at this point I think I tried to kiss him, but I'm not sure if we ever did. We went outside to continue the conversation, so we could hear each other, with my other eye on Ben making sure he wasn't making too much of a fool of himself.

He was. He ran out and stated that he was hooking up with someone, and then ran back in like a kid to his doll toy. We talked for what felt like ages, and

Ben finally finished up with his man who he brought out. I was not impressed, and this guy was all over Ben like burnt cheese. He wanted him to go back to his place. I showed Ben pictures of this guy in the morning, and he thanked me for not allowing him to leave with his new conquest. I remember Finn did something or acted like something that really turned me the wrong way. I turned to Ben and said he was a bad mess and a bad person and we both went home alone that night with a vague idea of what had happened.

Taylor arrived the next day, and we told her of our adventures. Ben had swapped stories and believed I was the one that was so drunk and ended up needing taken care of, I then reminded Ben with a photo of the dude he nearly went home with, Taylor laughed. We were both feeling a bit worse for wear, and Taylor was quite tired from her travels, so we decided to go for dinner and have a few drinks and see where the night took us, and of course who walked by us? Finn. We did the awkward hey situation, introduced Taylor, and then he kept walking on his own accord. He walked back a while later and we were still sitting there, so I offered for him to join us, if he was in fact alone. I thought I'd extend the kind offer to chill with us, as we were all drunk the night before, so who knew what had really pissed me off, he could have said "I like bananas," and I would have lost my shit if I wasn't getting what I wanted from the conversation. He didn't seem awkward so whatever went down last night he had seemed to have forgotten as well. We had a few drinks, and once we realised that Finn was pretty cool, we invited him back to the villa for some more drinks that we had stocked our fridge with by the pool. Plus, I wanted to suss out if he was into me or not.

The next hour I realised he was hitting on Ben more than me and I let it go and roll naturally. Even Ben was confused. We learned a lot about Finn that night. We learned that he was obviously a big fan of sex, and this is what ruled most of his world and his past relationships. No wonder he seemed so lost and

withdrawn. He continued to hit on Ben, and Ben said to me whether he was being weird or not, and then said he would never do anything out of respect for me if I still liked him. I told him to go for it, Finn clearly wasn't interested in me any longer so why waste Ben's chance? Finn became more aggressive throughout the night and even grabbed my ass at one point while he was still trying to hook up with Ben. As soon as Ben knows someone's interested in him, he runs away like a scared little schoolgirl because he doesn't actually believe it could be happening. I think after 3 hours of Finn trying on Ben, and Ben not giving much back he sought attention elsewhere and started to become aggressive with other party goers in the No. 3 club. He even basically raped Taylor on the dance floor at one stage, to which she felt uncomfortable even for a gay man. I could see it going downhill and at one stage Finn grabbed my face very violently and made me look at him, I could tell he had some issues when he drank too much. It was time for us to go. I got the others and we told Finn we were heading away, but sadly he now had all our phone numbers.

It was Ben's birthday the next day, so we did the usual presents and woke him up with a cute cake and video of how shit we all looked. We planned to meet two of Ben's friends later that night. Ben had also, in his bad decision making, invited Finn along. Finn and I would have to be friends or acquaintances the remainder of the trip at least. We went to The W, which was a fancy hotel and bar on the beach front of Seminyak. It was the place to be, we met a couple and their baby and were having a glorious time for a few hours and then Finn arrived. Finn didn't really add or take anything from the conversation, he was in a sense just a waste of space. Once the couple had to take the baby home, we decided to kick on for Ben's birthday at club No.3. It was here that Finn repeated himself. He followed suit from the previous night and got his angry drunk eyes on again.

We met up a few more times with Finn and he started to calm down his inner anger. We also found out that he lived in Sydney, not far from Ben and me. We

had discovered a new friend to go gay clubbing with once we arrived back home.

## 19. Lost

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*“When we’ve abandoned our territory, we’re not responsible rulers. We haven’t practiced, and instead of taking care of our territory we’ve run away from it and allowed conflicts and disorder to arise.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

My mum always used to say when we were younger that, “Everything comes in threes.” One bad thing happens, two more will follow, with no rhyme or reason. This however happened to be the case three weekends in a row for me and my poor clothing, coinciding with the move in and a new addition to the tree house, my amazing new roommate, Matt.

The first incident was when Ben and I decided to have dinner at his We got way too drunk, then booked an Uber to the city for no good reason and meet up with Finn. We rang him on the way cause Ben and I get sick of each other most times, so we needed an in betweener to fill the gap. I mean, Finn isn't fun, but he's also not that unbearable either. We Ubered to Finn's house for more pre-drinks. I was wearing something super gay, because I knew Ben would hate being around me if I did so, and I wanted to see how Finn reacted. Finn only ever wore the same black tee shirt and the same beige shorts. I had a t-shirt on as it was cold, covered by a very nice ice-cold blue collared shirt, then an oversized kimono that was light pink, followed by some super skinny jeans and some nice shoes. Then lots of ear jewellery, ones that had dangly things from them, also to annoy Ben.

It was freezing outside, but when you enter the club you basically have to strip off because it's so hot, it's a lose-lose situation. When I leave however, I want to be warm. We headed to Stonewall, the local banging hot spot on Oxford Street, and took our extra layers off and shoved them into a corner of the dance

floor. I removed my pink kimono and my blue collared shirt. We stuffed it next to the security guard who said he would watch them for us, which he probably did to a certain extent.

Then a few hours later after we had finished our boisterous need to let loose, like most weekends, we returned to the corner we had squished our clothing into, my blue collared shirt was missing from the pile. It was the most expensive of the items I was wearing, and the comfiest. The thief had good taste, if nothing else.

The next loss wasn't so much of a loss, it was more of a biohazard issue. I had invited Selena around for dinner, and there was no way that we were going to head to the city. So, we headed to the city; it was a series of unfortunate events. Matt had gone up the road for a birthday in Dee Why, but had planned to be back by 8pm. Ben was at a wedding but somehow managed to slip away from it because it was boring (his words not mine). We all ended up at the tree house, our residence, drinking far too much.

We then went to Stonewall. I decided to go for more of a grungy look this time, I'm super versatile btw, so I had my jeans, a shirt and a long-hooded jumper that acted like a coat, it had a mid-cut in the middle front of it that didn't come together. We were all pretty hammered, Selena and I had been drinking at the tree house for a few hours, Matt was well-deep into his beers.

Ben had been drinking from mid-afternoon on champagne from the wedding. To our surprise I was the first one to get kicked out. Not the straight girl, not the straight roommate, not even the guy that couldn't stand because he had been having champagne since 2pm, it was me. I wasn't with the other guys at this point so I texted them saying to stay in Stonewall, and that I would head directly opposite across the road to Palms, another gay club. One that plays better music and has a better scene. Stonewall was proving an angry bitch of late, first eating my shirt, then asking me to remove myself. Who did they think they were?



I lined up in the queue for Palms, with my jumper wrapped around me like the goddess I am. I was bored and the line was long. The guy in front of me was a short, chubby, bearded dude that was also alone. He was also quite attractive at least in my eyes, we started chatting, and naturally I offered him a smoke.

At this stage the others had seen my text and said they would follow over. I was distracted as Ben was walking between cars, and not very effectively. I dragged him over to introduce him to my new-found friend. I turned to look at Ben to say hi and a huge slam radiated from behind us. Our new friend, who we shall name Bear Man, had smoke bombed himself and fallen backwards onto the rim of a sliding door to the entrance of a shop front.

Bear Man had knocked himself straight out, which is hard for a gay man to do, cause they're gay, not straight. Bear Man was utterly unicorn unconscious. A pool of blood started to pour from his head. He had a huge laceration from the fall and was bleeding out! Bear Man luckily was still breathing but had no reaction when we tried to wake him. I quickly took off my jumper and placed it under his head where the laceration was. I held it tightly to clot the wound site and try to subside the blood loss before the ambulance arrived.

Ben joined me to support his head and placed his hand on his chest to monitor his breathing. A girl further up in the queue rang an ambulance and stood by us until they arrived. The paramedics turned up within a few minutes. They happened to be two guys that I saw regularly working in Emergency at the new Northern Beaches Hospital. They eased the situation and helped us put Bear Man onto a stretcher. The amount of blood that surrounded us once he was lifted was insane. Bear Man had definitely lost at least a litre of blood from the laceration and my jumper was utterly soaked with blood along with my hands, all the way up to my elbows. I looked like I had just been in a current zombie film. The paramedics disposed of my jumper as it was now a biohazard. Bear Man was sent off to St Vincent's Hospital. I wiped myself down with some wet

wipes the ambulance officers supplied and went into Palms to finish the tragic night, minus a jumper.

The common denominator in all these losses of clothing was Ben. The next night out, we headed to Manly for Matt's birthday, Ben also present. I had purchased this lovely blue and yellow flannel from H&M a few days prior to look the part; the colours and comfort radiated. We did the usual pre drinks at ours. Matt had his boys, and Ben joined the events as he had started going to the gym with Matt. Ben thought he could get less fat; it was never going to happen, but the idea excited him (he's still fat, so I was right).

It was cold once again, so I had shirt, covered by my flannel for integrity and look. It was warm in the club, so we all undressed and wrapped our clothes together in a corner. I was in my usual state, making friends right left and centre. Emma had decided to join us. We still weren't on great terms, but we were also not on bad terms. When we finally got to the end of the night, the lights came on, and the security guards started to escort us out, my beloved flannel was gone. The third and final act. It might have been the final act of losing things, but it certainly wasn't the ending of the partying or drugs.

## 20. I'm in Love with the Coco

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*“Whenever you are tired or unhappy, touching the Earth is a very good practice to heal you and restore your joy.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

For some reason, during the month of June, cocaine was readily available to Ben and me. It was still expensive as fuck, but around. He had tried this batch, and it was good shit, shit as in the sense, it was worth paying for. Naturally Ben and I organised our normal Wednesday dinner, but we decided to drink far too much, smoke too much, then realise that there was cocaine on the premises.

If anything is readily available and ready to go, I will use it. If I had to trek ten kilometres, or even to walk two kilometres somewhere for drugs, I wouldn't; I'm lazy a cunt. We decided that I would buy the bag off Ben, as I was keener for it than him, and also, I would probably do more. Ben was the stupid broke cunt that had pre purchased over \$1000 dollars of cocaine for some upcoming events he had. This event, however, was very unplanned.

We drank like fish, we had our meals and wine and got critically bored. We both didn't have to work till late the next day and the idea was to bump the cocaine all night. We ended up at Stonewall, our agreement, no making friends, just fun. We ended up in Palms, Ben had a panic/ anxiety attack, knowing full well we wouldn't get back in as it was after lockout. He decided that we needed to exit before full break down mode began, and I unwillingly complied.

We ran into the alley behind and we did a wee all over someone's footsteps, like the arseholes we are. We decided to do one more bump while sitting on someone's garden bed and figure out what the plan was. Ben had an idea, now that the anxiety attack had passed and another bump was hitting him internally, he stated, “I have an idea, you just be you, like normally, I mean like when

you're drunk. Just go up to someone and make friends with them. Then we will get invited back to theirs or a party or something and we can continue the antics.”

I replied, “Fat chance of that happening.”

Fortunately for Ben, his prayers were answered. We walked straight up to the main street on the intersection of Taylor Square and Oxford Street ready to cross to find a cab home, when we bumped into a guy called Patrick and his friend called Pilly. I told Patrick we had cocaine and that we were willing to share it. The night was not over; destiny and drugs had intervened.

Patrick was awesome, he's friend passed out on the couch and Patrick, Ben and I continued to do the blow and chill. Patrick and I had a lot in common, so naturally Ben decided that he liked him and wanted him for a husband, totally incompatible but I wasn't getting in the way of a friend's potential crush. I knew it would never amount to much, but it was funny he felt he liked him when he didn't speak to him the whole night, and he hated basically everything the guy played on YouTube for us. We danced around, dressed up in costumes, at one point I think I was in some sort of tight vest, for reasons unknown. We partied till the break of dawn then caught an Uber home at 7am to regret our life choices. We exchanged numbers, bumped into each other here and there, and then everything fizzled out naturally like normal. Farewell Patrick, farewell drugs, farewell drinks. Sadly, some drugs we are forced to take to help with our health, whether it be physical or mental. Side effects may occur.

## 21. Your Love is My Drug

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*“A strong emotion is like a storm. If you look at a tree in a storm, the top of the tree seems fragile, like it might break at any moment. You are afraid the storm might uproot the tree. But if you turn your attention to the trunk of the tree, you realise that its roots are deeply anchored in the ground, and you will see the tree will be able to hold.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

No matter what drugs you're on, whether it be for mental health, for an operation, for pain, or methadone for heroin, you will reach a point where your body stabilises and you can have more, and more, and more: a plateau effect. This is why a lot of past drug addicts overdose years later. They go back for that one hit, that one mistake, and think they can have that amount they got their body used to years ago, but sadly their body has re-stabilised itself from years of abuse.

The full moon's rays have shed an awful bright light on everything that is concaving inwards around me this week. I can tell there is an issue because it's also been four days since I have had a drink, I drink when I'm happy, not when I feel dull, down or sad. It's nothing major, nothing like the suicidal thoughts I have had before my meds, but it's almost like my dose, is finally plateauing out. Maybe it's time to go back to the doctor, up the dose a tiny bit more, I am on the minimum amount, 50mgs at the moment. I can always go up to the full 200mgs, but what happens after that, if its only taken me a year and a half on the minimum dose, and it's not having its affect anymore, how long will it be until I reach that full 200mgs?

*“In order to forget that we have blocks of pain, sorrow, fear, and violence, we lose ourselves in the practice of consumption.”*

## Entrust

### **22. Week 1 – The Opening**

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The opening of the new Beaches Hospital was always going to be controversial. It was overhyped and would cause the closure of two other major public hospitals in the area. There was a lot of resistance to the closing of the existing hospitals.

The new Beaches Hospital had seven levels with a helipad on top. The helipad was for the usual things a Hospital uses a helipad for. Not indulging the Bond dreams of overpaid millionaire Doctors, you filthy cynics, but airlifting critical care patients to and from the hospital. One of the arguments against the new hospital was that it would increase the travel time significantly for emergency patients in many areas of the catchment. There is a patch of road in Avalon called, "The Bends", a particularly narrow winding patch of road around a mountain with a sheer drop into the ocean on one side. Car accidents on the Bends tend to be pretty bad, but for some reason residents are also surprisingly resistant to driving safely and making changes to a patently dangerous road. They say it would change the character of the area, but I think it is how they keep the poor people out. Post-Bends is mostly millionaire territory, and if it's hard for the plebs to get there, it can remain an exclusive little enclave for those who can afford cars with fancy stuff like working brakes and emergency parachutes. They really hyped the helipad to reassure the rich people that they could reach the hospital quickly should they have a little Bends accident after one too many brunch- time mimosas.

Level seven of the new Hospital consisted of a cute little coffee shop with a fabulous view. To the North you could see acres of bushland with a Bahai temple in the distance. You can't see Kimbriki tip that sits pretty much right in front of the temple (something about angles and all that) so that's a win for physics or whatever science works that stuff out. I never really paid attention to that stuff in school. I was more of a drama queen, I know it's normally 'drama geek,' but I am not, never was, and never will be a geek, so queen it is. Level 7 also had a few specialist suites that were occupied by doctors. In the pecking order, Level 7 is the top of the food chain. Best views, best rooms. If a doctor makes it to level 7, then he can probably use the helipad to fulfil his Bond dreams if he wants to.

Level 6 consisted of more specialist suites, Ward 6C and 6D and our Specialist pathology Centre. The Specialist Pathology Centre is for the Specialist Doctors who are admitting their Special Patients for their Special groups and holds or cross-matches so they don't have to go line up with the non-special patients in the non-special parts of the Hospital.

Level 5 is the Surgical wards, separated into public and private sector. There are 4 external elevators and 3 internal elevators, which makes things pretty confusing when you were trying to navigate your way around for the first few days.

Level four is Critical care, and there was a death in the first three days. Whether it was due to lack of care in critical care, teething problems that always happen when you move staff somewhere new, or people just not knowing what was going on, is an issue for the coroner. An 86-year-old man fell from his bed, and due to his water retention and fragile skin, the fall caused large patches of skin to tear from his body. There was blood everywhere and the staff struggled to contain the bleeding.

All of the beds have rails that are about a foot high, but somehow a mostly immobile 86- year-old man was found bleeding profusely all over the floor with great swathes of skin hanging from his body. I have no idea why, but the Dr ordered blood tests on the man. It felt ridiculous stepping over a huge pool of blood to stick a needle in a man who was haemorrhaging from huge splits in his skin, while he begged to be left alone.

Level three are the mental health wards, which are surprisingly quite homely. Well, the private side is. Mental health doesn't discriminate, but the door bitches manning the private ward certainly do. If you are going to have mental health issues it pays to be rich, so get off your arse and make your first million before allowing yourself to be crippled to the point of hospitalisation by your fragile brain chemistry. If you are hospitalised with acute psychiatric issues and find yourself in poor man's land, it's your own damn fault for not managing these issues on your own long enough to first become an above-average income earner. I sometimes get the sense that the medical system somewhat blames people for having mental health issues and only begrudgingly treats them.

Mental health consists of four wards. Short Stay is a four-walled prison for up to eight patients that need to be strapped down or drugged. 3B is the private wards, which consist of mostly middle-aged men and women having a "rest."

3C is the ward you picture in your head when you think of a psychiatric hospital. Argumentative young druggies, aggressive people, the sort who are so messed up there is no hiding their mental distress from the world. You know how people say "I never knew there was something wrong" after a person kills themselves? No-one says that about patients of ward 3C.

3D is my favourite ward, it's the geriatric ward. Most of the patients seem lonelier than anything else, but they have a big Labrador that comes in to visit the patients, and the staff seem to really care.



Level two is maternity and paediatrics, again segregated along socioeconomic lines. There is also the special care nursery for babies with jaundice and any other issues.

Level one consists of a joint public and private ICU department, histology and Theatres as well as Recovery and Day Stay.

The ground floor is the Emergency Department. There is an Adult ED and a specialist Paediatric ED.

Each ward has a utility room which is stocked by Clinical Labs, and by god do they go through that stock. It is a full-time job keeping those rooms stocked. One of the teething problems at the new hospital related to stock. I don't know if they had seriously underestimated how much stock was required to run a hospital or if staff were being incredibly wasteful, but there were a lot of complaints about staff not having the supplies they required to do their jobs. The only thing that really made anything easier was the internal shoot system which carried bloods in this little carrier container system from each ward down to the lab. It could even shoot pharmaceutical requests and they could shoot the drugs back up to the appropriate wards, which saved a lot of running around.

A week in, I am working the private wards with Angela. We pretty much have it down pat and have figured most things out for ourselves. Our supervisor and area manager Sharon seemed to take the carefree approach now that she was in charge. Sharon was hard to pin down, didn't respond to messages, and liked to have useless meetings. After 6 hours on shift with no break for food or going to the toilet, it's frustrating when a manager calls a meeting to add more tasks to your list because other people are not doing their share. It's frustrating being lectured on how to do your job by a person who doesn't know what's going on because she doesn't want to know what's going on and actively avoids being contactable for this very reason.

The hospital itself is still having a lot of teething problems. Today the whole breakfast system broke down. The kitchen staff go around in the mornings with their trolleys and automatically put in the patient's request for what food they want for the next day. Each entrée, main and dessert has 3 options to choose from. Patients were not receiving the meals they chose, and breakfast was not being delivered until 9am. The Hospital starts waking patients at 6am for ward rounds and blood work, so this is a long time to wait for breakfast. Dinner is served at 5pm, so the meal system has patients fasting 16hrs. Well beyond the 12hr maximum for most fasting blood tests. No wonder half the patients have low blood sugars in the morning.

Today the automated system crashed, and everyone was automatically set a default breakfast that arrived a further 2 hours late. When you are in hospital, the only thing you have to look forward to is the food and the Wi-Fi. The last thing you need when you are already sick is to wait until almost midday for Wheat Bix.

Today our pointless meeting involves Sharon telling us to stick to the ward rounds list she has created. Only half the wards are open, and she doesn't know which ones, so her list is about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike. She isn't interested in listening to the collectors who are walking the wards and know which wards are open and what needs to be done. We are reminded that we start at 6am, but also told we are to be on the wards at exactly 6am. All referrals are faxed to a central room where they are sorted according to wards. Things are getting lost, misplaced, or filed in the wrong ward.

It takes me 20 minutes to locate all of the referrals for my ward. Then I have to either stamp them with the hospital stamp or place a hospital sticker on them, place urgent stickers on the urgent test results, collate the multiple requests for a single patient where the doctor has decided to add additional tests, then place

them in priority order. All of this takes about 40 minutes, which I am apparently meant to do on my own time so that I can be on the ward at 6am.

There's also the issue of poor communication. Patients are moved between wards and there is no system in place to tell us where they have been transferred to. Today, 10 of my 30 patients had been transferred to different rooms and wards to the ones listed on the system. When blood work isn't done on time, everyone gets angry and their aggression falls on me.

I understand that in critical care urgent bloods need to be done regularly, but most patients are getting done every morning, so I don't understand why so many patients are having their veins destroyed overnight by night staff and doctors. I know some things simply can't wait until morning, but I have never in my life seen more bruises or bloody cannulas than I am seeing here. One of my patients told me that the doctor who inserted her cannula was angry because she wasn't used to the type of cannula the hospital was supplying, so she yelled at the patient and blamed her when the cannula couldn't be inserted. This patient had massive veins. You could throw a dart from across the room blindfolded and there was a solid chance you would hit a vein. It would take a special backwards kind of skill to miss his veins. All of the technology that was supposed to make life easier isn't working that way

Yet.

I'm sure it will eventually, but at the moment the staff do not know how to use all the bells and whistles. There were no dry runs, no training. Two major hospitals working with broken antiquated equipment were closed in 2 days and the staff were expected to have no problems working in a completely new hospital with unfamiliar equipment. Why are they surprised at all of the problems?

Each day I see the CEO tottering from one side of the Hospital to the other putting out metaphorical fires. She's like a Mardi Gras float fireman,

inappropriately dressed for the reality of the job, designed to look like a pretty mockery of what a fireman is but the last person you want to rely on in an actual emergency. She needs to invest in some Nikes and some trail mix, running from one side of the hospital to the other like a life version of the movie Scream.

1 week in and I am utterly and completely exhausted. I'm averaging 15,000 steps and 50 patients a day. Not only am I physically exhausted, I'm also mentally exhausted. Trying to coax patients into letting me take their blood after their veins have been destroyed by the night staff, trying to be as careful and gentle as possible so that I have a usable vein to work with tomorrow, really is taking it out of me. Once you have conquered the hospital, you have conquered phlebotomy.

Today we had NATA come out to assess the hospital and clinical labs for accreditation. The National Association of Testing Authorities is a private, not-for-profit board, in representation of government bodies, industries and members. It is there to ensure that high quality standards are maintained and followed, in accordance with the regulations and laws made by government bodies. The hospital now having been open for three weeks was well overdue on its accreditation. Rumour had it that the hospital had no intention of passing, because "They already knew they were pretty shit, and did not have the ability to run at full capacity."

My employer had absolutely no intention of failing whatsoever. We wanted to make a good first impression, and to exceed the requirements that would allow us to continue to practice within the hospital walls. For us to pass the NATA assessment we had to demonstrate that we could perform a bleed with a real live patient according to NATA standards. The lab also had to pass an assessment to make sure that it was running to the required standards, the appropriate hardware was readily available, and all testing and guidelines were being followed by staff.

My manager and Sharon decided to volunteer me for the assessment. My manager was hoping I would perform to the best of my ability, and of course I would. I wanted us to succeed in this hospital, even if it was just to show KRONOS that they couldn't swoop in and steal our thunder. Clinical Labs was here to stay.

NATA arrived around 9am and decided to see me first. By this stage it was 3 hours since we had started our first ward rounds and I had had plenty of time to practice. Our Area Manager gave me a courtesy call to let me know they were headed up to the wards. I prepared myself with a fit young specimen of a man (there's nothing like eye-candy to spur you on when you are under pressure). It looked like he had good juicy veins so I wouldn't have to worry about the technicalities of the bleed and could focus on the NATA important stuff. I asked the patient for his permission to bring the assessors into the room and he was happy to comply. I met the two assessors, and both seemed fairly nice. We shook hands and I took them into the patient's room. I once again introduced myself to the patient and told him that the doctor had requested a blood test. Tomas was in his early thirties and was motorbiking around Manly dam when he came off his bike and broke his left arm. He was quite handsome and had a friendly smile. He was in good shape and I knew his veins would be ripe for the taking. I had forgotten that one of his arms was broken which limited my options, and of course they had a cannula in the best vein in his non-broken arm. Luckily for me it wasn't connected and didn't have anything diluting his blood from that side. He had a great cephalic vein that was far enough away from the cannula patch that it wouldn't cause any cross contamination.

After I introduced myself, I asked the patient to spell his last and first name and state his date of birth. His answers matched the information I had, and I checked his armband to confirm they matched. I located a great vein, then set up my gear, washed my hands, put my gloves on and went over to the patient. I

wiped down the area I would be taking the blood from and then used the other side of the alcohol wipe to wipe my left index finger to which I would be feeling for the vein again before jabbing him with the needle. It was an easy bleed and I filled my tubes then loosened the tourniquet and discarded my sharps. I then wrote up all the appropriate paperwork and blood tubes and got the patient to check and everything was la dee da. I was proud of myself that I was able to stay calm, do the procedure without too much anxiety about the assessors hovering over my shoulder, and help my new company get their accreditation. (Editor's note: Brendan was always going to pass the assessment. He is great at what he does, he truly does care, and KRONOS was foolish to let him go. If I had to pick someone to represent me before NATA, I would pick Brendan. Clinical Labs picked the right man for the job.)

## 23. The Partay

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I've been known to throw some pretty amazing parties throughout my years, but nothing ever beats my birthday parties, which I usually organise, host and then get considerably and awkwardly drunk at. You only need a few good elements to make a good party: loose cunts, not the vagina type, just good friends that can handle themselves and can have fun drinking or not drinking.

The second element is to have plenty of alcohol in reserve, there's no time to think, just time to drink. If you come under prepared, that's fine. Have some of the group alcohol I have already pre-purchased for you, dumb fucks.

Then thirdly, music and a balcony or great view. Usually these elements will allow you to have a good time.

I always had an OCD part of me, where I enjoy getting things set up two days early, even if it meant that all the chairs and stools that usually resided inside the house were now outside on the balcony. I washed all the wine glasses and lined them out on the dining table, with a cute little sign made out of scrabble characters saying wine station. I swept the balconies, cleared any mess and vacuumed like the whore I am. I got wine a week before on sale from Aldi, ordered my beers through Qantas wine as that shit was just far too heavy to carry up the driveway, and ordered some subway platters to feed the drunken guests.

This year was going to be very different from the last: I wasn't in-between jobs, I had left the DHM past behind me, I had also left Clinical Labs and the useless manager Sharon. This year it was people I loved, people who had supported me over the last year, and new work people from my new job at the hospital.

I had a hot team leader called Richard who was more of a Twinkie version of Zac Efron, but was very down to earth and though he could be useless, he always wanted the best for the team. My boss boss (my manager you could say) was a big and wonderful lesbian. I invited both of them to my birthday, but Richard had just dislocated his knee a few weeks before, so I didn't believe they would attend. When they did arrive, which was the surprise of the century, they brought extravagant gifts. I was even forced to skull a vodka cranberry sack while getting drenched. I mean, I can swallow, and I can swallow hard, but for some reason the drink just didn't go down this time. As it started to pour out of my mouth like a bad waterfall; it was just too much for me to handle. My bystander friends described the moment as awkward, aggressive, unnatural, concerning, and more or less voluntary. But the thing was, I didn't give up; I finished that sack to the end. I was smothered in cranberry juice and there was no way I was going to contract any thrush that night from what I had just inhaled. I had also never been given the option to be forcibly and inappropriately manhandled by my boss lesbian to skull a goon sack. It had been a new and exciting adventure.



## 24. Downfall

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*“We act on the basis of wrong perceptions all the time. We should not be sure of any perception we have.”*

I have learnt to live with many mistakes over the years, but one thing I am unable to live with is an injustice done to me or others, because of corruption, corporations and of course money. I'm definitely no stickler for rules when it comes to my own choices in life, but I have learnt when in a workplace, like we all sadly have, we as people are menial things to be thrown around. We abide by the changing protocols of companies protecting themselves.

My friends say I have a defence barrier, from all the mistakes and misunderstood hate I've had projected towards me over my childhood and growth. I have failed over and over again, I've disappointed myself more often than not, and that is something very hard to live with, to forgive yourself for, but you have to try. Whether that has forced me to be stronger or harsher, I'm not sure yet, but I am always on the defence. I've lost a many a friend, many a co-worker and many a job because I chose what was right over wrong, to my standards and ethics. We all do it; I just must be a very, very, slow learner compared to others, or I'm naturally always up for a fight.

I have worked in a lot of toxic work cultures. I've had nine jobs over my career of fifteen years. Some lasted longer than others, and some were far too short. This story is about my last job at the NB Hospital in Sydney, run by the tyrants Healthscope. There is always a villain in stories, and usually a hero. This story only has villains.

My good friend Leonie had moved from Clinical labs inside the Hospital to a new job as a Patient Liaison Admissions Officer. It was an upgrade in pay by

eight dollars an hour, with a \$500 incentive if Targets and KPI's were met within the quarter. Leonie happily left Clinical Labs.

Three months after that, Leonie got me an interview with her team leader, Richard, and his boss Katrina, who was a fellow queer. Naturally I smashed the interview and Richard took an oddly weird liking to me. Healthscope's HR department was lacking. It took 3 weeks before I even got the online login to be able to accept the offer for the job. Once I had the online system on my computer in front of me, it was beyond backwards. There was no contract, just a shit load of stupid online tasks to finish that any idiot could pass.

I attended the orientation, grouped with about 50 other employees including admin, nurses, doctors and mental health. We were forced to sit through each other's introductions. Then the 4th CEO of the hospital got up and did a little introduction. The hospital had gained more than its fair share of bad press. Most of it was true. It was lacking in most cardiac facilities and was understaffed 99% of the time.

I was trained by a woman called Cheryl. For some reason we naturally clicked, but she always had an ulterior motive, so I kept a safe distance. While trying to take in all the training that was shoved into a 2-hour compilation, I had to watch Cheryl work and try to pick up what I could. The next three shifts I was left alone. Most hospitals require three persons to be on shift at all times during the busy period of the PLAO shift, but because Richard didn't give a fuck or even bother to double check the roster, half the time, often no one turned up, or only one person did. Richard is a doctor's son, and got the job because he was a doctor's son. He had had the righteous path set up for him since birth. He also cut his hours from 9 – 5 to 10 – 3 Monday to Friday because he had been recklessly driving and nearly killed himself and totalled his car. He lost his license and his only way to the hospital other than public transport, which was clearly too good for him, was to get his parents or sister to drop him

off, or even sometimes Katrina would take him to and from work, which also cut her hours of work, but #righteous #doctorsson overrides anything else or anyone else.

I tried to decipher the programs I was shown briefly from the day before, trying to get it done right. Nothing was looked over by Richard or Katrina. I got a high five for working by myself and trying hard. Where was the support, though? There was none, and there never was going to be, having two fuckwits running the program. When I was scheduled on with Cheryl or other staff I would try to learn as much as I could from them. I was instructed by the team around me to do certain things. Cheryl wasn't actually a trainer; she had just been given the job by Richard cause he was too lazy to even show his face at work most days. He usually hid in his shared office, and from what I was aware, didn't do a whole fucking lot.

I was informed by Richard and Cheryl that if a patient was too unwell to sign certain forms, we could either write on the forms "unable to sign", or with their consent, initial the form for them. I was trained a certain way, and I followed protocol to the best of my knowledge. I was trained by a piss-poor team leader, but I tried my best to learn what I could, in the right way, with the help of my team members, who in the end eventually betrayed me. We were a group of 12 mixed individuals, race, gender, sexuality, marital status, and anything else you could think of.

I had had about 5 days off work because I had been doing so many shifts in a row, and due to the lack of caring in rostering by Richard, I had to swap a few shifts with Mary, who had done the right thing and told Richard what days she needed off, three months in advance. Richard had just rostered her on and hadn't noted anything about Mary's trip, so we were forced to fix it ourselves. Mary was like the woman from the movie *Something About Mary*, that lives with Mary in Miami, that's tanned up to a leather crisp, bleached blonde hair

that was dead and barley, a complete and utter drunk, useless, and completely stupid, oh I forgot to mention even the saggy tits matched, basically, any evangelist Trump supporter.

Mary and I had always got along, I had helped her many a time over as she didn't really understand the systems we worked on. She had already been there two months before I had arrived, but I found myself helping her more often than not. Everyone found her annoying, because every time anyone was having a conversation, she would ask them to repeat it, no matter how trivial it was. Mary wanted to know everything. If gossip was on the agenda, Mary dropped any work she was doing so she could become part of it.

Once I had been there for the 3 months, everything seemed easy. I was making friends amongst the nurses and the doctors as well as the team. I emailed Katrina and Richard saying my three months had now hit its mark, asking if I was required for a probation meeting. I was more than happy to sit down with them. Katrina and Richard just replied with "Sign this letter so you can get your pay rise and we will have a meeting in the next two weeks to have a chat about how well you're doing." Well, no such meeting came. I asked again, and they just replied that it was a really busy time and we would get around to it eventually.

I hit the 4-month mark, and we were all called into Katrina and Richard's office in secrecy with the door shut behind us. Richard and Katrina said we had been performing really well and we had registered a 43.6 conversion rate for the quarter, for making admissions go private. Katrina then awarded us all individually a \$250 Visa card voucher which we could spend. She then explicitly said not to tell any other staff or family members, as this was an incentive the hospital had decided to come up to encourage conversions. I had heard of the voucher thing, but the conversion had never been hit before my

time, or even since the hospital had been opened, so it was all just hearsay and bollocks to me before this point.

A month prior Richard had released one of his monthly emails that the team had suggested so he could keep us updated, also under the instruction he would tell us in person. This was when I was mostly doing over nights and didn't see much of anyone but got an update here and there. This letter was 4 pages, had the KPI's for the quarter, targets, other hospital news, and in the middle of it all, a one-dot bullet point saying; Please get patients to sign all forms now.

Sadly, I missed this point, and continued for that 4th month to get initials and "unable to signs." Mary then expressed her concerns to the team that I was still getting initials, but no one wanted to pull me up on it as they felt it was Richard's job to do so. So, Mary, the natural gossip she was, started to create some rumours, "have you heard what Brendon is doing? He's signing up patients without their consent. He's still initialling." No other teams were aware of our protocol. They didn't do admissions, what they had heard from Mary was, "Brendon is admitting patients without their consent on their private health insurance."

The rumours flew, surprisingly, not back to me. The end result was that I was then admitting patients without their consent. Cheryl resigned a week later. Richard pulled her into his office wanting her to admit that she had seen me doing this. She refused, as she hadn't, and explained that that was the old protocol. If anything, he should inform me of such a breach and tell me I must have missed the newsletter with the new protocol. However, that's not the way it went. I was allowed to continue for another two weeks, Richard, Katrina, and HR all knowing about the claims. They continued to allow me to then "allegedly commit fraud" under their new protocol, so they would have more evidence of me "doing the wrong thing", without even knowing I was doing it. After the two weeks I was pulled into Richards office and was handed a letter.

I kindly asked Richard what the letter was about, he sat there with a smug smile saying he knew I had been committing fraud and initialling without the consent of patients. I sat there in shock and looked at him. I was lost and confused, he said, "do you have anything to say?", and I said, "No, not at the moment, I'd like to read the letter." Richard then pushed me out of the office. I read the two-page letter, which stated this:

Dear Brendon,

Request to respond to concerns regarding misconduct in the workplace. I refer to alleged workplace misconduct that has come to our attention.

Nature of Allegations

You will note that the allegations are related to you initialling financial paperwork on behalf of private patients admitted through emergency. The allegations are serious and require investigation. They are particularised at the bottom of this letter.

In the event that the allegations are substantiated, it is likely that they will constitute a breach of Healthscope code of Conduct.

As you would be aware, Healthscope takes allegations of misconduct extremely seriously and will take all appropriate steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our employees, patients, doctors and community.

*(Yeah fucking right!)*

Please be aware that while no findings have been made (*this comment still astounds me*) that the outcome of the meeting may result in disciplinary action being taken, should it be deemed appropriate in the circumstances, up to and including termination for serious misconduct.

Alleged Incidents

It is alleged that you have been initialling financial paperwork on behalf of the private patients admitted through emergency. We have found initials on

multiple informed financial consents and HC21 claim forms of patients admitted by you.

*(These alleged visit numbers were all within the two weeks of them knowing I was unknowingly still initialling paperwork, as I had been trained).*

Signing this paperwork is to acknowledge as a patient that you have been informed of the financial costs and potential costs of your admission to the hospital.

*(I gained consent of every patient I admitted. This could even be proved, which I requested before my meeting that they go to medical records, pull out the front page which consents to them going private and seeing all their signatures on the front page. This was the only form, when I was trained, that I was told that needed a full signature. Furthermore, they could ring each of these individual patients and ask them whether I asked them. Neither of these things were done.)*

I continued to work the next two days with everyone knowing I had been pulled in for a serious meeting, because Richard asked me in front of half the team. Discreet it was not. Then I was also told not to talk about ever having the meeting, even though he was the one that basically made an official announcement about it in front of the whole of the emergency team.

I was confused, upset and mostly hurt by the allegations. I knew my job; I knew it from Cheryl. I asked Cheryl for her help, to write a letter in defence of my training, despite the fact that she had resigned a week after this all started.

This is an email from Cheryl to Richard and Katrina during the enquiry of fraud that Healthscope said that I allegedly committed.

*Cheryl Vitt <Cherylvitt@live.com>*

*Thu 28/11/2019 11:40 PM*

*Richard Small; Katrina.Nenata-Hergin@healthscope.com.au*

*Hi Richard,*

*Following on from my conversation with you on Monday, I felt compelled to clarify a few things. I myself did not witness Brendon signing the election forms himself, but was rather advising you based on feedback from my colleagues.*

*In hindsight, I do recall when training Brendon, telling him that originally, we were told we could write, "pt. unable to sign but elected private," in lieu of a signature where one was not able to be obtained, but that we are no longer aloud to do that anymore. I told him, however, that if I found a pt. was unable to provide a full 6 signatures, that I would have them initial them instead. Especially in the case of elderly DVA pt.'s. (This was still acceptable at time of training Brendon).*

*I believe there may have been confusion during this exchange, especially when coupled with the bombardment of new information when one is learning the role. I think when you add the pressures of achieving conversion rates and keeping tbc's to a minimum, it's an understandable mistake.*

*The purpose of my bringing it to you, Richard, was just so that you could advise Brendon to no longer do it. I, as his counterpart, did not feel it was my place to do so (neither did any of my colleagues). I guess I believed it*



*could've been easily resolved by way of a simple conversation coming from you.*

*I don't mean to intrude or mean any disrespect, and write to you in earnest, despite now being a former employee.*

*Thanks, Cheryl*

I was trained this way from the day I had started. Anyone that was not capable of signing certain forms I fell back to this example of what I was taught. The follow up or disciplinary meeting was set for Monday the following week at 9am. I was scheduled to do the Friday, Saturday and Sunday overnight shift, which was 10pm to 6am, finishing at 6am Monday morning, Katrina and Richard, being so useless, hadn't even checked my roster, expecting me to go home after a night shift then return after, most likely with as little as two hours sleep, to do an internal investigation of fraud upon me. I informed Richard, and he said he would just change my Sunday shift so I could be present on Monday, three days out. I declined. My roster had been given to me two weeks prior, I was a full-time employee and any changes either had to have my consent within the 7 days occurring, fair work trading. He was being a smug prick and that Monday was going to be my one day off before 7 days of overnights and I was taking Joseph out for a birthday lunch that day. He himself had taken the day off work so we could do it, so I wasn't about to go bail on him, I barely saw him enough normally to then cancel on his birthday. It was something I was not willing to do.

Richard was useless. He just decided to change the shifts then expect me to accept his authority; I didn't. He then changed four people's shifts without their consent, ordering them that this was the change due to a meeting he had with me. So, it's ok for Richard to tell everyone, but if it gets out, then it's my fault

as I was told not to talk to anyone! After back and forth and about 10 emails, it was clear that Richard had been informed that this meeting was happening on Monday no matter what.

He rang me on the Friday afternoon. He said, “Hey Brendon.”

I said “Hi”, and an awkward silence continued, I said “You rang.”

His reply, “Oh yes, so HR has advised me to put you on stress leave until the meeting on Monday until the matter is resolved.”

So I said, “I still have to come in at 9 am on Monday.”

He said, “Well, since you won’t be working now, and receiving stress leave on full pay for the shifts would you mind?”

I agreed.

Within this letter I was advised to bring a support person, and I did, one that will be unnamed because their value is of more worth to me than anyone in this story. I arrived early to make sure I didn’t look like I was trying to avoid the whole thing. I saw my manager, Katrina who would not be attending the meeting or have any contact with me during the investigation. Katrina was with her sexuality assaulting confidant George Pel and her actual girlfriend who she was trying to push into the hospital for a job. They completely ignored me as I walked by, trying to at least throw a smile their way. Which was odd as Richard, Katrina and Peggy had all been at my house 3 weeks before for my 31st. I was now an insect to them, disregarded because I was no longer important.

The meeting was fast. They were there to point their fingers and put the whole blame on me. I had no hope. The meeting went just under an hour and the one direct quote from Richard that still resonates in my head was, “You didn’t even seem remorseful when I handed you the letter. You just said ‘Okay,’ and

walked out.” Oh, honey, if you knew anything, you know how to pin the blame on someone else, that’s for sure.

I was told to continue on stress leave (paid, luckily) until the matter was resolved by the executives, on the recommendation of termination by HR. I was fired a week before Christmas, paid out in full with my annual leave, cut out the from the system, with my emails going to junk mail. I only knew I was fired because I received a lump sum payout three days before we usually got paid. I was disgusted by my treatment.

To cover your tracks from your own mistakes, then blame it on the individual, some high horse these people have.

What you need to realise is that this is a high-pressured job and people are being admitted to emergency from a range of illnesses or accidents. After they have been triaged by the nurses and categorised as what risk, patients are then looked over by the doctors, who will then inform the NUM and the NAV, Nursing Unit Manager and Nursing Navigator, whether or not the patient needs to be admitted to the Hospital. This is where things start to get complicated, and where my job comes in.

## 25. Hospital: Corrupt Much?

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*“Whatever kind of action we take, if we look deeply into it, we'll be able to recognise the seed of that action.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

The hospital is run by a private corporation, so in fact it is therefore a private hospital. But under Medicare and government rules, all Emergency Departments have to be public. So, from our taxes, as Australian citizens, we pay for Medicare. Which then entitles our right for free health care services by any hospital that is covered by Medicare.

The other law that is determined by the government is that each patient has a four-hour window. If they breach that four-hour window and are then admitted to the hospital, the government charges \$30,000 per patient that breaches that 4 hours. So, the lack of care and assessment by nurses and doctors is heightened. They then pressure us, the PLAO's, to either back-date a patient so they don't breach within our system or to earn enough private admissions to cover the costs of breaches that day. We, as a team, were instructed to lie and change times in our system so the hospital would not be fined and then effectively charged.

There is a fine line with losing yourself, getting pay from an earning job to support your livelihood, and doing something that you know is unethical. How are you meant to know if you're doing something wrong, if that's the way you were trained by your managers, and they in turn have effectively lied to your face, and then deny such allegations?

Our job as PLAO's is to inform the patient what cover they are entitled to. This patient then makes the choice to either go private or public. This is a hard line. Sometimes you might get better care using your private health insurance if

you are covered, but if used, the limitations of what you can gain after discharge from your Medicare may be then blocked because you chose to go private during that stay. You are then forced to use other costly and ineffective measures of care privately, because you went private. This is all dependent on what you are being treated for, whether you will need rehab after as well as other Medicare services unknown to you that you may need at that point of time. You are effectively, as a patient, making a choice that in the end could cost you thousands more out of pocket, when Medicare public services would provide the same services for free. Yes, there are some benefits to going private, but this is all dependent on the hospital, what agreements they have with doctors and health care insurance companies. Each hospital varies.

I myself am not a treating doctor, sadly, but most of the doctors don't even know the difference themselves between what services private or public provides a patient, or what out-of-pocket cost they may incur. They have no idea how any cover works, or what benefits would be accessible to that patient, depending on the patient's condition. Our job as PLAOs is to inform the patient what they are covered by in the hospital by their private insurance, if they have any.

As a PLA0 we are not taught what certain conditions require what certain treatment or after treatment. Our job is to gain the consent of the patient to check what cover they have if they are paying for private health insurance. To be fully covered for everything including mental health services, per individual, it could be anywhere from \$150 to well over \$200 dollars per month in health insurance. This entitles you to not be charged the Medicare level at tax time, which is \$1000 when you are under 31. But if you have chosen not to have cover from 31 and upwards, you are charged the \$1000 per year at tax time. For every year after you don't elect to have that private health, a percentage is added and continues to go up and up. Even if you now choose to elect to get private

health insurance after this age of 31, you're still fucked. You'll get a discount but still get charged a percentage of the Medicare levy because you didn't have it before the age of 31 in a continuing agreement.

Because the NBH had such a bad rap, as PLAO's we were trained that if a patient decided to elect the use of their private health insurance, we would waive their excess on that cover, which usually only goes up to a maximum of \$750. We at NBH however decided that up to \$500 dollars of the excess would be ample to get enough conversions, or technically an incentive, to get patients to convert to being a private patient. Because the hospital had such a bad image, there was an unwritten agreement with the doctors, theatres and anaesthesiologists that they were unable to charge any extra costs or gaps. So effectively to be admitted as a private patient it would be beneficial for you to at least get your excess waived, which was then waived for the year to any hospital. You would then receive a specialist to do your surgery, priority in the theatre line, and any follow-up appointments with the specialist would be covered.

There is currently a parliamentary inquiry into most hospitals that have discovered that doctors, who have a specific code as their ID, have been giving this provider code out to their interns to use so they can act on their behalf, do the surgery, and take care of that patient without the specialist ever being present.

Most health fund systems are available to us 24/7 through the hospital system called Eclipse. But you have patients that are technically under duress, in major pain, or have some form of mental issue that makes their decision not necessarily applicable under the law. We are hired to do a job that is, in a way, very unethical. Unless you truly believe that choice, that decision, made by a family member who is willing to take on any extra out-of-pocket costs to the person that is being admitted, you don't really ever gain consent.

So, to put it simply and to reiterate what I have just said, a patient comes into emergency,

or via an ambulance. They are then triaged by the triage nurse, who assesses the patient and gives them a CAT rating from one to five, five being the worst, such as severe chest pain or your fucking leg needing to be amputated. All other categories go down from there, to abdominal pain, to a slight cut to the hand, to a dog bite. They are assessed accordingly by the trained nurses. You are then either sent back out to the waiting room where a doctor will eventually pick up your case, which could be anywhere from 5 minutes to 5 hours. This is not part of the breach, as technically you have not been admitted yet. All serious cases get admitted directly to the emergency ward straight away. The emergency ward is Public. And therefore, all costs will be covered, even if you are on interim Medicare, meaning you are becoming a citizen, or an overseas visitor that has private health insurance through their government and we have gained a guarantee of patient directly through their health fund. Also, part of our Commonwealth agreement is that you have as a citizen certain sanctions within certain countries, 11 in all, which means as an Australian citizen if you went to hurt yourself in that country and needed medical assistance you would be covered under their medical system.

1. Belgium
2. Finland
3. Italy
4. Malta
5. Netherlands
6. New Zealand
7. Norway
8. The Republic of Ireland

9. Slovenia

10. Sweden

11. The United Kingdom.

Apparently alphabetical order matters.

If you're a visitor from overseas and have no form of health cover or travel insurance, you are basically fucked. If you are an Australian citizen who has left the country to go work in Turkey and have been paying taxes in Turkey and not in Australia for the last 5 years, no tax at all or any income through the Australian government, your Medicare has relapsed. You are not benefitted through Medicare, under the law. This in turn costs you a hospital fee to even be triaged and then admitted to Emergency. Our cost at the NBH was \$400 but this can range, depending on where you are in Australia. Then if your case is so severe, and you are required to be admitted, which is still your choice, and as PLAO's to inform you of what out-of-pocket costs, as an estimate, you will be charged as a private patient under the law, per day.

Your overnight stay at NBH would be \$1378 per night. You would pay for your pathology which is usually every day and the tests are anywhere from \$110 for a full blood count to over \$1000 for gene testing. You also pay for your theatre costs, which could be anywhere from \$400 to thousands of dollars depending on your surgery. Your specialist then charges their fees which are usually anywhere from \$3000 dollars upwards, and the anaesthesiologist can range from \$1000 to easily \$5000 depending on how long the surgery is. If they have any complications or need to add another surgery on top of the one you're already having because there were unforeseen circumstances, you are charged on top of that. We present the patient with these costs, and my usual statement is, discharge yourself, get home ASAP and use whatever you can in your own country's medical system as it will be a fuck load cheaper than ours.



So, we send off our check, and the response comes back through the Eclipse system, with a basic layout of the cover, and what is and isn't included. It could look something like this.

Mid Hospital \$500 Excess –

Silver Plus

Mid-range Hospital cover to help keep the larger concerns covered.

A medium level Hospital cover including treatment for cardiac issues and cancer and helps pay for inpatient hospital and medical costs in both private and public hospitals across Australia for included services.

*(There is also no excess for kids when they're admitted into hospital.)*

Silver Plus Hospital

Product Availability

This product is available in each state of Australia. This statement provides information on the benefits available and the premiums in Provides cover for Base premium before any rebate, loading or discount. You may be entitled to the Australian Government rebate on this premium. Your individual premium may also include a Lifetime Health Cover loading, an age-based discount for 18 to 29-year-olds and/or a corporate discount.

Medicare Levy Surcharge (MLS)

NSW & ACT

Single - only one person

\$129.60 per month

This policy exempts you from the Medicare Levy Surcharge. Get in touch Call us on 134 135 Visit [bupa.com.au](http://bupa.com.au) Log into [mybupa.com.au](http://mybupa.com.au) Visit your nearest Bupa Store

Policy Information

This document provides general information and guidance about the product, including an overview of what is and is not covered,

comparative ‘base’ premium and example benefits. The information in this document should be read in conjunction with Bupa’s Important Information Guide, fund and policy rules. For more information and to discuss your specific needs, please contact us. Call us first.

When planning treatment, call us first to discuss your options.

The number of things I have to check before making a call of whether the patient I admit will be covered or not, and if I make the wrong choice and they are charged, the hospital is liable and I as a PLAO will most likely lose my job.

However, this doesn’t necessarily state whether this patient has pre-existing medical condition before the cover was bought, which means it is then void. Unless it has been registered, we could be giving misinformation to any patient at any time, based on the systems we are required to use. A faulty and treacherous system, in the end, that could ruin people's lives. This shows the very poor standard of our private health care system.

The hospital also created an offshoot of emergency, called Emergency Short Stay, which is in effect a place to transfer a patient “technically” to the ward, just from one room to another on the same floor, to allow for less breaches of the 4-hour nature. We as PLAO’s were encouraged by Richard and Katrina to convert these patients to private and waive their excess so we could reap the benefits of their short stay as they were technically being admitted to the ward and could charge their Health Funds for this.

## Reflection

### 26. No Fear

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*“When we look deeply into our fear, we see the desire for permanence. We’re afraid of change. Our anger, our fear, our despair is born from our wrong perceptions.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

I was given a gift, a gift to tell stories. I believe this, no matter how much negativity I receive back from readers. I know we all have something to say. My grandmother inspired this story: her strength, her love, her compassion for a different world. She gave opinions throughout her life, throughout her era. This book is only one part of me.

Your key and lock may not be the same as mine. My key was my family, to learn and understand, to not repeat a past that had cause more damage than good. This truth allowed me to unlock myself from my own destruction. Everyone has their own path. You just need to look for it. It's that simple.

This move back among family allowed me to have a certain structure that I denied myself, because I believed I was stronger, that I was better, that I didn't need help or a support system. That was so clear. I had set up so many barriers around myself, my way of living, “the right way.” or the way I thought was best for me. I didn't want to conform to that natural sort of order. I had to find my groundings, to see that I did have limitations.

This move gave me a sense of purpose, to reconnect with my parents, to hold tight to what was so clearly right in front of me. We moved in together the month the social-distancing rules of COVID-19 came into effect. I basically did the whole EAT, PRAY, LOVE situation from day to day. My mother taught me

how to use the sewing machine. We planted a veggie patch on two sites, constantly pruning the bushes. The dying plants came back to life. We ate healthy, we exercised, we read. But what I learnt most was that I had always had the power to do this.

I know now I will look back on this time, this time of sanctuary, that they were indeed the best days of my life. The days I was able to reconnect with my family on so many levels. To connect with myself again, to find love within myself.

Friendship, relationships, family, any sort of connection requires some form of contact, a contact that requires motion. That motion is energy, a very simple multidimensional thing that can be seen from a lot of different angles. You will always find someone who will find relevance within that energy you send out. This is what makes us humans vulnerable and amazing.

Things can be so easily overcomplicated. We're all fucking complicated, but for some unknown stupid reason, we want to make it more complicated. “Easy” just sounds way too god damn simple.

Communication is key, something I have never really mastered. What I did master was alcohol; my communication came from that. My communication was usually aggressive and one sided. It was my view. Follow all the same mistakes I made, and those I didn't. You won't learn until you experience them yourself.

Some people will love you from the beginning, the middle, sometimes all the way right up to the end. They are my people, and they are your people too. You just have to find them. And find you!

*“We cannot find anything that is permanent. Flowers decompose, but knowing this does not prevent us from loving flowers. In fact, we are able to love them more because we know how to treasure them while they are still alive.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

## 27. Forgive

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Lockdown became a new and unwelcome term. Nature became the new, easy outlook. It had this oddly calming effect, in that way that it always had, but when people are stuck in a one-bedroom apartment in the city and can't use that nature to find their calm, they became broken. I was lucky enough to have that outlook, that space, that awe.

I did miss my prior extravagant whorish life; however, I knew it had become unachievable, clearly unattainable unless I was Cardi B. My dream was to be this high-riding slut. I would define white privilege with no consequence. A socialite who carried a broken misery. Yet with Covid taking its rightful place, my idiotic dreams of becoming a white influencer for everyone else soon faded, to be replaced with a mighty joy.

Lockdown became the new, New. It became another obstacle people thought they had to conquer to let society know their asylum and imprisonment. Instead I saw it as an opportunity to learn, grow, and to rediscover who I was. My gut instinct told me I needed guidance: a familiar structure of, well, anything. Something to hold me to the ground that I was standing on.

Here lies 4 months of lockdown with my 64-year-old father and 63-year-old mother. Mother has finally learnt to knock, or to knock once and not enter if no reply is initiated while I watch sci fiction in my room. We have come a long way from the days where mum would just burst open the door and strip my sheets at 6am.

Dad never really came into my space, besides the time he decided to buy me a soccer ball. He dedicated this one Sunday afternoon to taking me up to the local park. He tried so hard to get me to kick the ball around while he became a makeshift goalie. We mostly bonded over tv shows or movies.

A wise woman once said to me, "Only you know what kind of story you are trying to tell, here." This story is about accepting the beginning, the middle, and the end. With an ending that only resonates to your expectations. I didn't expect to please, nor should you.

Change can be a choice, an uncertain discovery that you slowly piece together like a puzzle. When you find a piece that fits into place, a certain unconscious learning begins. A new purpose, one where your mind is made up. Whatever had been worrying you consciously becomes a little clearer.

So, when to change? If you fail, so be it, you tried and the only person you have to look at is yourself. Your strength will prevail if you want it to.

You can see that my life spiralled out of control. I had a choice to make: lose my independence or make a choice to uproot everything I trusted.

What did you and I learn from this book? A lot, as I need to make sure I glorify my life and time. I learnt that even though I wanted to stop drinking, I went back to it. Was that a failure? NO. Was it a learning experience? YES.

Failure is not a crime, nor a disappointment. You will set goals and you will fail them. Reflect on that.

This book wasn't about being perfect, it was about finding that release, that halfway grounding, that self-love.

You can be an incompetent shithole of a person, but the only thing that defines you is the respect you hold for yourself. So, love yourself. It's that simple. And that hard.

The End