

Dr J. Michael Davey

journey of  
hope



SYDNEY | AUCKLAND

# Endorsements

“I commend Journey of Hope to you for all its rawness, emotion and importantly, awakening.”

**Jeffrey G. Kennett. AC. Director, Beyond Blue.**

“Journey of Hope reveals the confronting story of childhood abuse and neglect. How the author survived these appalling ordeals will give hope and inspiration to all that read this book.”

**Steve Irons. Federal Member for Swan and former State Ward.**

“Michael Davey has been through enough tough stuff in his life that would break most of us. His story is harrowing, inspiring, authentic and amazingly, optimistic. Even more remarkably there are more than a few laughs on the way through. What an amazing man, what faith, what a book!”

**Leigh Hatcher. TV news presenter and journalist, Sky News Australia and Open House presenter.**

“Resilience and optimism are the gems that shine in this confronting story. The author’s powerful testimony is that no life need be controlled by the past when forgiveness and love shape the future.”

**Bishop Peter Hayward. Anglican Bishop of Wollongong.**

“This is a remarkable and powerful story. It is also confronting. I congratulate the author for writing this book and encourage you to read his story – you will be both challenged and inspired by it.”

**Rev. John Reed. Chaplain, The Illawarra Grammar School.**

“The extraordinary story of a man’s survival in the face of great adversity. It is sometimes confronting and disturbing, but always inspiring.”

**Dr Sal Sanzone. Medical Practitioner and Lecturer in Medical Education, University of Wollongong.**

“This is one man’s remarkable journey from tragedy to triumph.”

**Dr Kevin Hole. Dentist and Theologian.**

“Brilliant and uplifting...a true account of an incredibly brave man’s journey.”

**Karen Chapman. Clinical Psychologist.**

“This compelling book reveals the confronting details of an abused and lost childhood. It is also a moving and superbly written story of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity...a must read.”

**Leon Kane-Maguire. Emeritus Professor of Chemistry, University of Wollongong.**

“This book is written by a brave person. My hope is that it is widely read. It is an inspiring story that needs to be told.”

**Roger Summerill. OAM. Chairman, School Council, The Illawarra Grammar School.**

“An inspirational story. The author is only halfway through his life and one wonders where his attributes of resilience, determination and stamina will take him. The next instalment will be eagerly awaited.”

**Dr James Heiner. Psychiatrist.**



Ark House Press  
PO Box 1321, Mona Vale NSW 1660  
Australia  
Telephone: +61 2 9007 5376

PO Box 47212, Ponsonby, Auckland  
New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 9 416 8400  
[www.arkhousepress.com](http://www.arkhousepress.com)  
Ark House Press, a division of Media Incomp.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher. Short extracts may be used for review purposes.

All rights reserved.  
© 2011 Davey, Dr J. Michael.  
ISBN: 9781921589461 (pbk.)

Cataloguing in Publication Data:

Author: Davey, J. Michael.  
Title: Journey of Hope : a remarkable true story / J. Michael Davey  
ISBN: 9781921589461 (pbk.)  
Subjects: Davey, J. Michael.  
Australia. Royal Australian Navy--Biography.  
Teachers--Australia--Biography.  
Sailors--Australia--Biography.  
Adult child abuse victims--Australia--Biography.  
Dewey Number: 371.100922

Printed and bound in Australia.  
Cover design and layout by Media Incomp.  
[www.mediaincorp.com](http://www.mediaincorp.com)

# Dedication

To my children Samantha and Jonothan. Samantha – you'll always be my 'little princess'. Jono – you're the best mate I've ever had. Together, Samantha and Jono, you're my greatest achievements – nothing else comes close.

To our 'Forgotten Australians'\* and anyone who's ever been in foster care, and or institutionalised.

To the memory of Emeritus Professor of Chemistry, Leon Kane-Maguire – mentor and friend.

\*'Forgotten Australians' are people who grew up in church or state care. All former wards of the State are 'Forgotten Australians'. There are approximately 500,000 such people.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Care Leavers Network Australia – CLAN\*, for access to their library and newsletters. I'm also appreciative of the assistance of both Glebe Council Library and the New South Wales Department of Community Services, for historical information concerning Bidura Children's Home, Corelli Babies' Home, Royleston Boys' Home and Yarra Bay House. Thank you to Belinda Dickinson, Gary McKay and Jean Burton for their valuable insights and advice.

\*CLAN is a national support and advocacy organisation dedicated to supporting those who grew up in Orphanages, Children's Homes, Foster Care, Church or State care. Visit them at [www.clan.org.au](http://www.clan.org.au) or call 1800 008 774.

# Contents

Author's Note	8
Preface	9
Foreword	10
Introduction	11
Wards of the State	13
Royleston Boys' Home	33
The Ferntrees Again	49
Kidnapped	59
Back at Royleston	69
Home at Last	81
Primary School	97
High School	137
The Royal Australian Navy	159
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	175
Bonnie	187
A Dark Place	199
Facing My Fears	211
A Brighter Future	237
Epilogue	241
Postscript	245
Appendix 1 Bonnie's Thoughts	247
Appendix 2 Samantha's Thoughts	249
Appendix 3 Jonathan's Thoughts	250
Appendix 4 A Consultant Psychologist's Thoughts	251
Appendix 5 A School Student's Thoughts	253
Appendix 6 A School Family's Thoughts	255

# Author's Note

Owing to the extremely sensitive nature of this story and out of respect for the privacy of people in this book, certain names and places have been changed. Any reference to any individual who may share the same name is coincidental only and no damage is intended to be caused.

The conversations and events of my childhood and youth are to the best of my knowledge, as I remember them.

In telling my story you'll notice that I use slang. I regularly spoke this way well into my adult life and to some extent, still do. This conveys things as they really were.

Ten-percent of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Mission Australia's Triple Care Farm, which helps adolescents, including those who are homeless, who suffer substance addictions, mental illness and or acute behavioural problems. Visit Triple Care Farm at [www.missionaustralia.com.au/community-services/1631-triple-care-farm-tcf](http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/community-services/1631-triple-care-farm-tcf)

For information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and where to get help, visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or call 1300 22 4636.

# Preface

This book was written for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to celebrate the innocence and beauty of childhood. These years are extremely precious. My childhood was largely lost, but in it I still discovered a remarkable thing – the power of love. Experiencing love gave me hope, which helped me endure many challenging circumstances. Despite the difficulties I encountered as I journeyed through to adulthood, the exquisite wonders of childhood still held me in awe. I cherish dearly these special and significantly important childhood memories. I hope you enjoy celebrating them with me.

Secondly, I wanted to highlight the plight of children in foster care. Many fostered children were, or have been given up by their parents or carers, mostly in unfortunate and heartbreaking circumstances. A number of these people experienced great trauma at the hands of the people meant to provide safety and care.

Thirdly, I wanted to describe my depressive episode and encourage others who have been in this dark and disturbing place. If you're still there then take heart – it will eventually pass. In dealing effectively with it I'm encouraging you to seek professional help, just like I did. To anyone who has a family member or friend suffering from depression you must continue to love them and never, ever stop doing this. Sometimes they don't understand what they're doing or the consequences of their actions.

Lastly, I wanted to make a simple statement – it doesn't matter what difficulties you've experienced in your journey because you can still find happiness and purpose in life. In essence, this book encourages you to reach for the sky.

**Dr J. Michael Davey**

Christmas, 2010

# Foreword

Michael Davey is one of many Australians who has lived with depressive illness personally and within his family.

*Journey of Hope* is his account of the challenges and highs of his life to date.

Against onerous odds Michael has become a highly educated contributor to our society. His story should provide encouragement to others, who at times feel life is not worthwhile.

Life is, and always will be.

I commend *Journey of Hope* to you for all its rawness, emotion and importantly, awakening.

**The Honourable Jeffrey G. Kennett. AC.**

Inaugural Chairperson and Director, Beyond Blue.

# Introduction

Psychiatry is an interesting profession. The old saying that patients are either sad, glad, mad or bad does not come close to capturing the reality of the wide and varied individuals I have met during the 25 years that I have been a Psychiatrist. I have been privy to both the joys and triumphs of fellow human beings. It is a privileged position.

No matter what the presenting symptoms may be, there are a number of variables that are not totally controllable and which have a significant impact on the eventual outcome for that individual. Personal resilience, determination and stamina are qualities that ‘cannot be instilled or transferred’ in someone by counselling or medication. Michael Davey possesses these attributes and his story is testament to what can be achieved when someone is so blessed.

Michael is only halfway through his life and one wonders where his personality traits will take him. One can only guess. His story is an inspirational one and the next instalment will be eagerly awaited.

**Dr James Heiner**



# 1

## Wards of the State

Malcolm sat down on the front steps of our house and couldn't believe what was happening. He watched helplessly as his five children were bundled into a taxi. Spring was in the air on that early day in September, 1959, but Malcolm was distraught. He sobbed as we were driven off to foster care.

I was only 17 months old at the time. Jethro was the oldest at eleven, Clara was nine, Tanya seven and Catherine five. After a journey of some 40 minutes, the taxi driver dropped us all at the Sydney Metropolitan Children's Court. Jethro carried me in his arms and I was crying. Some older men were standing at the back of the waiting room and my brother spoke to a clerk, "Where's Mum and Dad? What're we doing here?"

Jethro's questions were never answered. The people in the waiting room seemed cold and unconcerned at my brother's distress. One of them even laughed at him and said, "Missing your mummy are ya lad – eh?"

"Shut that baby up, will ya!" another man blurted out.

Jethro took me to a chair and sat down. Our sisters joined us. Still holding me in his arms, our brother was worried at what might

happen to us. It wasn't long before the Special Magistrate judged that we were neglected children. He then placed us in the care of the Minister for Child Welfare and Social Welfare, to be dealt with as wards admitted to State control. Put simply, we all officially became wards of the State.

Suddenly, our sisters were taken away and we sat on our own. Jethro had no idea where they went and was still worried for us both. A short while later my brother was taken to Royleston Boys' Home. He didn't want to leave me, but he had no choice. As I was taken out of Jethro's arms he became anxious for me. "What about Michael? What's going to happen to Michael?" he cried. No one answered.

After Jethro was taken I was sent to Bidura Children's Home where my sisters were, but I was kept separate from them. After a short stay in Royleston, Jethro was fostered to a family in North Sydney.

Royleston Boys' Home and Bidura Children's Home were two state-run institutions designed to house wards of the State. My siblings and I were placed in them on many occasions in our disrupted lives.

After their short stay at Bidura, my sisters were taken to three separate foster homes. This was the first time I'd been separated from my family.

From Bidura I was taken to Corelli Babies' Home, located in Marrickville, which is a suburb on the southern side of Sydney. After a stay of about four weeks, I was taken to a family in Eden, a town on the far-south coast of New South Wales.

The Ferntrees lived in a small house that was on a long dirt road leading out of Eden. As a young boy, I'd stand at the front gate for hours at a time, watching the busy life of Eden pass me by. Travelling on that road were many Holden and Ford cars and of course, an abundance of trucks. Across the road from my house was a park. The vivid, green foliage of the trees and shrubs contrasted strikingly with the golden-brown colours of the dusty road in front of my house. Beyond the park was the ocean and the view was beautiful.

My foster parents, Mrs Ferntree and her husband, Clive, had

always told me that they weren't my real parents. This was somewhat confusing because they never said anything about why I was staying with them and where my real parents were.

The first time I remembered seeing my father was when I was five years old and it's still remarkably vivid. It was late in the afternoon and I was at home with my foster family. They explained that he was coming to visit, but could only stay for a short while. My curiosity got the better of me. "What's me Daddy's name?" I asked.

"Don't you be concerning yourself with that," said Mrs Ferntree. "You can ask him yourself when he gets here."

Arriving at the front door, my father asked Mrs Ferntree if he could see me. When I heard his voice I ran to the door and stood peering at my father from behind Mrs Ferntree's legs. Although it was a little confusing, I was excited that the man standing at the door was my father. He smiled at me and reaching out, took me by the hand. We walked out to the front fence and sat on the ground.

My father had visited me once before I later learned, so I was able to recognise him, but only vaguely. "What's ya name, Daddy?" I asked.

"Name's Malcolm."

"Can I sit in ya lap, Daddy?"

"Of course!"

Malcolm reached forward and pulled me onto his lap. I put my head up against his chest. Running his fingers over the top of my head Malcolm said, "I see you've still got your sausage curl, Michael." I had blue eyes and curly, fair hair and for a boy of my age I was tall.

I remember asking Malcolm about my mother and why we weren't all together as a family. "Unfortunately, Mike, Mummy's sick and in hospital and so we can't be together," said Malcolm. His voice sounded caring. "When I'm at work, there'd be no one at home to look after you. I'm sorry that things can't be any better than that, Son."

"What's wrong with Mummy?"

"Your mother's in hospital because she can't seem to overcome her illness. I'd like to tell you all about it, but you're too young and you wouldn't understand, see?"

“Yes, Daddy.” I was uncertain of exactly what he meant.

Malcolm lit a cigarette and I asked him if my mother smoked.

“Yes, Michael, Mummy smokes.”

“When she’s in hostipal?” I kept on.

Malcolm laughed at my mispronunciation and stroking his chin with his right hand, tried to think of a way to teach me how to correctly say the word hospital. His eyes suddenly lit up. “Yes, Michael, when she’s in *hos...pee...tal!*” he laughed. “Now, try it again.”

“Hostipal.”

Malcolm laughed again and hugged me.

“You’re just like your mother, Mike. You like to ask lots of questions and sometimes get your words wrong.”

For some reason my father used to call me four different names. Michael, Mike, Mikey Boy and Michael Angelo. Although it took me a while to get used to this, telling me I was like my mother made me feel special.

“What’s Mummy’s name, Daddy?”

“Patricia.”

“I like her name, Daddy.”

“Yes, I like it as well, Mikey Boy.”

“Is she beautiful, Daddy?”

“Yes, Mike, she is very *bew...te...full!*”

Malcolm didn’t understand why I couldn’t pronounce my words properly. At that time it wasn’t well understood that fostered and institutionalised children were often hindered in both their intellectual and speech development.

Continuing to sit in Malcolm’s lap, I looked at him and smiled. He hugged me and I hugged him back. It was wonderful seeing Malcolm and I didn’t want to let go.

My first clear memory of Malcolm was truly special and even though I knew little about him, I loved him. We were together for an hour or so and up until that point in time it was the most enjoyable hour I’d spent in my life.

Telling me he had to leave, Malcolm kissed me full on the lips and with his arms still on my shoulders added, “I love you, Michael,

and don't you forget that, Son."

"Yes, Daddy."

Malcolm put a cream-coloured half-face helmet on his head and told me he had to ride all the way back home.

"Where's our real house, Daddy?"

"We live in Revesby, a suburb in Sydney, Mike." I pleaded with him not to leave. "I've gotta go, Mikey Boy. Mummy needs me and besides, your new family's looking after you. Everything will be alright."

Malcolm put me behind the fence and closed the gate so I couldn't follow him. I stood on the bottom part of the gate on my toes and reached for my father. Malcolm kissed and hugged me one last time and then jumped on his small motorcycle. Reaching into his backpack he pulled out a small gift. When he passed it to me I opened it with excitement and to my delight, saw three small cars and a truck.

As my father rode away, I stood near the fence crying and waving, wishing he was still with me. When I couldn't see him any longer, I walked back towards the house and saw Mrs Ferntree looking at me through the curtains of the front window. When she saw me looking at her the curtains quickly closed.

I went inside and she confiscated my cars and truck.

Malcolm was only ever allowed to come and see me once a year and to see him for only a short time hardly seemed fair.

Not long after he'd left, a sense of foreboding flooded my thinking. Malcolm had no idea what was happening to me when he wasn't there. My foster mother was a domineering woman who commanded my attention and respect. Her husband, Clive, was submissive. Mrs Ferntree had her brother staying with them from time to time. His name was Uncle Robert. When I was alone with him he would make me feel uncomfortable. He did things to me a man should never do. However difficult I found it all, I was the only one who saw my tears.

Despite my foster Uncle's behaviour, I tried as best I could to be a good boy for my foster family. There were many times when I'd tell Mrs Ferntree how I felt. "I love ya, Mrs Ferntree."

"That's nice, Michael," was the usual reply.

I sensed from a young age there wasn't a great deal of sentiment in the things I was told. "Do ya love me too, Mrs Ferntree?"

"You're a good boy, Michael," she'd say, "and that's what's important."

*Why doesn't she tell me she loves me?* I often wondered. "Does Clive love me, Mrs Ferntree?"

"Clive likes you, Michael, and that's all that matters."

I was a sensitive young boy who longed for affection. I really wanted to hear Mrs Ferntree tell me that she loved and cared for me, but I can never remember her telling me such things. Despite the fact that I wanted to be close to my guardians, I felt acutely alone and isolated as a young boy in their care.

Not long after the visit by Malcolm, Mrs Ferntree, Clive and I moved to Warilla, a southern suburb of Wollongong, on the south coast of New South Wales. It was a bit over a 90-minute drive south of Sydney. Living in Warilla, I was never allowed to play with any children until I started school. In the years before kindergarten, Mrs Ferntree kept me locked in her backyard with strict commands never to leave. During the day, she'd regimentally check that I hadn't wandered off. It was more than just checking that I was safe because there was far more control associated with it.

It was a lonely existence being isolated in the yard, but it was here that I developed my vivid imagination. Having to spend day after day on my own, I created many imaginary friends. Despite the creativity of doing this, there was a certain amount of anguish associated with it. I'd regularly hear children running up and down the street outside the property. Being a sociable child, I wanted to join them, but Mrs Ferntree was adamant that I wasn't to go outside the yard and never gave a reason that I can remember. In these depressing times I'd sometimes sit down and start crying, wishing to be with Malcolm. I was certain there would be freedom in his care and that I'd be allowed to play with children my own age.

One lonely morning in 1963 when I was five years old, I was playing in Mrs Ferntree's yard when I heard the voices of a group of children yelling in excitement at the front of our house. I went to the gate and began jumping up and down, thrilled to see them. Noticing

me, they came over to chat. There were four children including Trisha, who was seven years old. She was a tall, attractive girl who lived next door. There was another girl called Marilyn who was six years old and she lived opposite the Ferntrees. And there were two boys, James and Jeffrey, who lived next door to Marilyn. They were six years old also.

Trisha was the first to speak, “We’re all playing together. Do you want to join us?”

“I can’t. Mrs Ferntree won’t let me leave the backyard. If I did I’d be in big trouble,” I said.

They were a friendly bunch and we continued to chat. I was enjoying their company when Trisha suddenly walked off, saying keeping me in the backyard wasn’t fair. Not long after that Marilyn, James and Jeffrey also left. Sad that they had gone, I sat by the clothes line and began playing with my cars and trucks, which I made from blocks of wood. These toys gave me hours and hours of imaginary fun. The cars and truck my father gave me I never played with. Mrs Ferntree kept them hidden away.

I heard a noise coming from behind the garage. Curiosity aroused, I scampered over to investigate. As I moved closer the noise became louder, sounding like an animal caught in a trap. I peered nervously around the corner of the garage and saw, to my complete surprise, Trisha hanging over the fence with her dress snagged on a fence paling. She was wriggling from side to side trying to free herself. “Trisha, what’re ya doing? You’re all tangled up!”

“Help me get off this fence, Michael!”

Grabbing my new friend, I pulled her off the paling. As I did, I asked why she was behind the garage. “I wanted to play with you, Michael. It’s not fair that you’re locked in the backyard,” she said.

We moved from behind the garage, climbed the fence and found some shade under a large tree growing along the side of her driveway. We sat and chatted. She told me about her parents and how much she loved them. She also told me about her little brother and how they all got along so fabulously well. I was envious of Trisha’s close relationship with her family.

It was remarkable that in all the time I’d been with the Ferntrees

this was the first real encounter with another child that I can remember. Initially, Trisha wondered why I was staying with the Ferntrees. Her mother was told by Mrs Ferntree that my foster carers weren't my real parents. In explaining the entire situation as best I could, I told her about the man who came to visit me just before I moved to Warilla. "He's me daddy," I proudly said, "an' I'm gunna live with 'im one day!"

Trisha asked me about my mother and where she was. "I don't know, but her name's Patricia an' she's very pretty," I said, "an' she asks lots of questions, just like me!"

I added how much I wanted to be with my parents which brought tears to my eyes. Trisha could see I was sad. Grabbing my shoulders, she moved her face close to mine and kissed me full on the lips, just like Malcolm had done. It took me completely by surprise and was only the second kiss that I could remember.

"Michael, I know that one day you'll see your mummy, so don't worry!"

It was wonderful being consoled by Trisha, but before too long we were startled. Mrs Ferntree's voice bellowed through the backyard. "Michael!"

Trisha whispered goodbye and helped me climb back over the fence.

I walked around the side of the garage and noticed Mrs Ferntree.

"I'm over here," I said.

Mrs Ferntree looked at me sternly. She asked what I'd been doing. I didn't want to get Trisha into trouble and unable to think of anything else I said, "I've...um...been...um...playin' on me own, Mrs Ferntree."

"You've been out of the yard, haven't you?" she demanded.

Without a chance to reply, she began spanking me on the backside, the small of my back and my thighs. Mrs Ferntree was furious and I was sent to my room and not allowed to come out for hours. I pleaded with her to let me out so I could go to the toilet, which was down the path.

I was crying because I desperately needed to go. I couldn't control myself and pooped on her expensive carpet. I felt so embarrassed.

Still unable to come out of the room made things even worse and I stood with the filth for what seemed an eternity.

I heard voices outside the door. Mrs Ferntree and Clive were arguing. “He has to be allowed to go to the outhouse!” Eventually, my foster father came in and cleaned up the mess and allowed me to go to the toilet.

Despite the times when Clive would side with me, there were other occasions when he said things that disturbed me. I was at home with him one night and we were sitting at the dining room table having our dinner. I’d been in the backyard most of the day and ventured around the house and behind the garage, where there were many insects. As I was sitting down at the table, I felt something moving near my belly button. I tugged up my shirt and saw what I thought was a spider scurrying across my lower stomach. I screeched out and Clive said, “Oh, be quiet, Michael. What’s wrong with you?”

I asked him what would happen to me if a spider had just run across my stomach. “You’re probably going to die,” he laughed.

I went to bed that night genuinely believing that I might not wake up in the morning. Tears flowed as I thought I may never meet my beautiful mother, Patricia.

It was late in January, 1964, and Mrs Ferntree was sitting in the family room filling out a form. I asked her about it and she explained that I’d need a uniform if I was to start school. Coming through the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, my uniform consisted of blue, short-sleeved shirts with 26-inch chest, grey shorts with 26-inch waist and grey socks to fit my size-11 feet. Although I can’t remember these actual sizes, as an adult I was able to access my welfare file, which documented my time in foster care. In it were these details. Under the Freedom-of-Information Act, anyone who has been a ward of the State can now gain access to their files.

Once I had the uniforms, Mrs Ferntree told me I was going to Warilla Public School and Trisha would walk me to the bus stop on my first day. She went to the same school and was in Year Two. I was excited at the prospect of going to school because I’d be allowed outside the confines of my backyard. My first day in Warilla Public

couldn't come around quickly enough.

When Trisha and I walked to the bus stop together on that first day she held my hand.

"I'll show you how to get to school, Michael," she said.

It was the first time we'd spoken since she'd been caught on the fence. Trisha asked what had happened when Mrs Ferntree found out I was in her yard – Trisha said she heard me being smacked and crying. I told her about my spanking. Trisha squeezed my hand gently.

When we arrived at school I was amazed to see so many children. My life was suddenly exciting. Trisha showed me around and I felt alive having all that freedom.

It was always great to be with Trisha and in a short period of time, we'd become close. Even as a five-year-old, I knew exactly how I felt about Trisha. I couldn't deny it – I'd found a special friend.

There were times when Trisha would take me into her backyard. Of course, there was always the chance Mrs Ferntree would learn of it, but Trisha made my kidnapping only a short venture. She kept me just on her side of the fence so I could quickly jump back over if my guardian was on the prowl.

Trisha brought out her best plastic china and made me pretend cups of tea and baked the most beautiful pretend scones. Although it was only make believe, it was wonderful. She was adamant that when we grew up she wanted to marry me. The fact that she was two years older than me didn't seem to be an issue.

Mrs Ferntree became a little less strict with her rule of keeping me in the backyard on my own after I started school. She occasionally allowed me to play with some of my friends who lived nearby. Although it had to be in our backyard, it was exciting having someone to play with. On the other hand, Clive had a different view of my friends. He was far less strict than Mrs Ferntree and would encourage Trisha to come into our yard. It was during times like these that he was exceptionally friendly towards Trisha. There were times when Clive would invite my best friend into our house, usually when Mrs Ferntree wasn't home. I'd always be made to stay outside. This was frustrating because I was always excited when she was over, but I could hardly ever play with her. I'd often wonder what

Trisha and Clive had been doing together. When she reappeared outside, Trisha never seemed as bubbly or friendly and would often go home straight away. Sometimes I'd ask her if she was alright, "Trisha, what's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Michael. I just have to go home now."

Even though Trisha said she was alright, I sensed something was wrong with my best friend.

Going to the toilet at night was always a frightening experience at the Ferntrees. Their outhouse was in the back left corner of the yard. I sometimes saw ghosts on my way to this all-too distant and smelly building. One night as I felt the urge, I was walking along the verandah to the rear steps and saw a ghost. It was white, tall and shaped like a triangle, being wider at the bottom and narrower at the top. When I saw that frightening thing, I froze. Looking directly at it, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. I nervously mumbled a greeting, "Um...Hello."

It bent over and leaned towards me with its head finishing only centimetres from my face.

"Hello," it casually replied.

The hair on the back of my neck briskly stood to attention and I immediately ran back into my room where I hid under my bed covers. I lay awake for hours trembling in fear and only peered over my bedclothes when I needed fresh air. The following day I was still terrified. If only I could have felt comfortable enough to talk to my foster parents about it all.

The next night I felt the urge to go to the toilet again and plucked up the courage to go back onto the verandah. Creeping out onto the steps, I peered down towards the toilet and noticed another ghost. This one was also white, but nowhere near as tall. It looked like a pirate wearing a hat, and had one wooden leg. It pushed a wheelbarrow round and round the toilet. Just like the night before, the hair on the back of my neck stood to attention. I raced back into my room, jumped under the bed covers and lay trembling in fear. I really needed to go still, but somehow I hung on until morning.

When I was six years old, Trisha came over one day. Mrs Ferntree

wasn't at home. Clive took her into the garage, but I was left outside. I went and sat down with my wooden cars and trucks and began playing. After a short while Clive came out and Trisha walked over to me and sat down. She wasn't herself. "What's wrong, Trisha?" I asked.

Trisha took me by the hand and we went around behind the garage. She explained why Clive never allowed me inside my own foster house when they were together. She said he'd been doing things to her and it was their little secret. Trisha said it was called 'playing rude doctors', but I didn't understand what she meant. "I'll show you," said Trisha.

After a short while I felt a powerful, tingling sensation that I'd never felt before.

Although I didn't think of it at the time, it was a remarkably poignant moment because something precious was taken from me.

I believe what was taken from me in that brief and innocent encounter was taken by someone who didn't know what she was doing, by someone who was abused and who was just a young child. I also believe that Trisha had something as equally precious taken from her by someone who shouldn't have ever been alone with a young girl, by someone who took a beautiful young girl and stole her innocence. As I grew up, I had a burning anger towards this man and what I'd been told he'd done to my best friend.

Although that innocent encounter should never have happened, at such young ages we had no idea what we were doing. As naive young children, we were just acting out what an abusing adult had shown her. We thought for a time this was normal behaviour. As a six-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl, we were innocently intimate with each other on a number of occasions. Regrettably, this went on for a number of years.

We often sat together in a park on our way to school, chatting. We always held hands and kissed each other. Trisha would share her dreams with me. She said she wanted to be a nurse and I told her how I wanted to be a truck driver. As we'd done previously, we talked about growing up and getting married. As sometimes happened, we were intimate in that park on the way to school.

I never told Mrs Ferntree what we were doing because I was too afraid of her. In fact, we never mentioned it to anyone. I never told Trisha what Uncle Robert had done to me. Like the way I felt towards Clive, I grew up having a burning anger towards my foster uncle.

I had regular nightmares and one in particular replayed itself time and time again during my entire unhappy time with the Ferntrees. It'd wake me up and I'd always be trembling. It had a frightening effect. In it, there was an enormous paddock and I was being chased by this awful creature, unlike anything I'd ever seen. Everything in the dream was purple in colour. Although I never knew the real reason for the nightmares when I was experiencing them, children who are being sexually abused often have recurring nightmares such as mine.

Kindergarten was an exciting adventure because I could spend time playing. In this childhood pursuit I discovered something that brought me endless joy – running. When it was recess, I'd go outside the door of the classroom and start running and race all over the school and around all the buildings. Being enclosed in the backyard of the Ferntrees had its limitations and to have the freedom of the schoolyard was wonderful. But according to my classmates I looked ungainly when I moved beyond a slow jog. When I'd exhausted my energy supplies there was no time for eating. Not long after recess I'd always be hungry. This often caused a commotion and ended in tears for me and quite a large amount of frustration for the teacher. "You are supposed to eat your food during recess, Michael!" I was told.

I just didn't get it. Inside the classroom, I'd find it difficult to sit still. After sitting down for a couple of hours at a time, I really needed to stretch my legs.

On one sunny Saturday when I was six years old, my father arrived at the Ferntrees totally unannounced. His unexpected visit was a wonderful surprise and I was excited to see him. After asking the Ferntrees if it was alright for us to spend some time together, he took me outside the house and we sat in his car. Leaving his

motorbike at home, Malcolm drove his second-hand Volkswagen Beetle. We were sitting in the front bucket seats when he took off his hat. I noticed Malcolm was losing his hair and he'd started to comb it from the left-hand side across his balding head.

I asked him about Patricia. "Your mother's still in hospital, Michael," he said.

"When's she gonna get outta hospital, Daddy?"

"That's hard to say, Mike," he replied. Malcolm smiled at my mispronunciation. "It could be next week, next month or next year. No one knows, Son."

Malcolm couldn't fix the problems with my speech on his last visit and he didn't try again. "If Mummy comes outta hospital can I come home an' live with ya, Daddy?" I asked, expectantly.

"Yes, Michael. As soon as that happens you can come home and we can all be together."

I asked Malcolm why Patricia was in hospital. "Your mother's got bad nerves, Michael," he said.

"What's that mean, Daddy?"

"It means she's made herself sick by worrying too much," Malcolm replied. He looked wistful. "No more questions about Mummy, Michael, alright?"

"Yes, Daddy."

Malcolm was sitting in the driver's seat of his car and I watched him smoking a cigarette. Leaning back as he often did, Malcolm faced upwards and blew the grey smoke into the air. He puffed on his cigarette again and went to pull it out of his mouth, but the butt of the cigarette was stuck to his lips. Instead of gripping the cigarette and removing it from his mouth, Malcolm's fingers merely slid along its length, dislodging the burning end, which fell between his legs. From there it somehow found its way into Malcolm's shorts. There was no time to lose. He quickly lifted his lap off the seat, but unfortunately a rather large steering wheel was directly in the way of his rapidly rising lap. I think it both fair and accurate to say that Malcolm's crutch copped the worst of the impact. He also banged his head on the ceiling of the car. The two impacts occurred almost simultaneously. Malcolm brought his lower regions back into the car

seat and I sensed something was wrong. “Are ya alright, Daddy?”

“Ooohhh,” was all my father could say.

The burning ember was still in Malcolm’s pants and he quickly jumped out of the car. Standing by the driver’s side of the rice-bubble shaped vehicle, he shook his legs and waist in order to remove the smouldering ember from his shorts. Malcolm looked funny to me with one hand on his crutch and the other on his head, as he stood by the car rotating his hips and wobbling his knees. Some of the neighbours, standing in their front yards, were entertained rather well by Malcolm’s jiggling actions. Except for the fact that he was a male and rather slim, Malcolm wouldn’t have looked out of place in a belly-dancing troupe.

It certainly took some time for Malcolm to regain his composure. Being only a young male, I had little understanding of the pain Malcolm must have been feeling. But I felt sorry for him and jumped out of the car and ran around to give Malcolm the greatest of hugs. “I love ya, Daddy,” I said.

“I love you too, Mikey Boy,” Malcolm said. His voice was high pitched.

I held onto Malcolm for what seemed ages. Eventually letting go, we sat back in his car and chatted for some time. Before I knew it, though, Malcolm had to go. We kissed each other and he left. With watery eyes I watched as Malcolm disappeared into the distance.

Although life could be a little slow and boring being housed with my foster parents, one day I noticed Mrs Ferntree in a happy mood as she packed her car. I was intrigued. When I asked her why she was so happy, my foster mother said we were going to see her parents. They lived about six hours away on a farm. She didn’t speak about them often and I’d only seen them once or twice when I was young, but had no clear memory of them. This meant, of course, that I had foster grandparents who I was about to meet. The next day we headed off.

It was wonderful being in the country and seeing all the trucks that journeyed across our state. There were big ones and small ones and I couldn’t get enough of them, especially the big rigs. They were

similar to the truck Malcolm had given me as a gift.

Mrs Ferntree's parents lived on the outskirts of a town called Yass. After arriving, Mrs Ferntree introduced me to them and they seemed like caring people. They asked me to call them Grandma and Grandad. Being friendly folk, I obliged. Grandma was in her 70's and had white hair. She really enjoyed cooking cakes, delicious scones and puddings that contained small, silver coins. Grandad was similar in age and had lost all his hair. He ran a cattle farm. They also had a large number of chickens.

The Ferntrees left me with this caring, elderly couple for an entire week and the freedom they gave me was wonderful. I was allowed to go practically anywhere I wanted, except in the paddocks where the cattle were. On the first day with them, I'd just seen a black snake and only ever having seen them in books at school, I was jumpy. I told Grandad and Grandma that it had slithered into the long grass next to the footpath and with all the enthusiasm of a pair of snake-charmers, they bolted into the grass trying to find it. Thankfully, they never saw the venomous creature.

Leaving me on my own again, I found an adjoining house on the property. It was still under construction. No floor boards had been put down and large floor beams were exposed. I was jumping from beam to beam when I tripped on one and fell forward. As I landed, I cracked my skull on the next beam's sharp edge. The pain was unbearable and plenty of blood was running all down the front of my shirt and pants. I ran screaming into my foster grandmother's arms and she stripped off her apron and held it to my head as Grandad sped to the doctor's surgery with us. My forehead required a number of stitches as the surgeon rejoined the sections of my flapping scalp.

The next day I was sitting down in their backyard and Grandma accidentally spilt a large tub of boiling water all over me. Jumping up in complete shock, I ran screaming all over the yard. Having to contend with chickens, bantam chickens and roosters running and flying everywhere, Grandma eventually caught me and I calmed down. She had a gentle nature and walked me into her kitchen. Taking a bar of butter, Grandma rubbed it all over my upper body. I was amazed at her soft touch and kind apologetic words. As I sat

on the floor, I glistened like a chicken that had been painstakingly prepared for cooking. I licked some of the butter on my hand and it suddenly occurred to me that apart from my father and Trisha, there were other kind people in the world.

The following day I managed to break my finger when I got it caught under a wheelbarrow full of wood, which had tumbled over. I began screaming for the third time since arriving on the farm and my foster grandfather was extremely patient and gentle with me saying, "There, there, Michael. It'll be alright. Everything will be alright."

For quite some time my taped finger wasn't alright, but the love and compassion they showed to me was wonderful. At the end of the third day with my foster grandparents, I genuinely felt I was loved. It was a beautiful feeling.

On the fourth day I discovered a home-made billy-cart at the back of the house. Excited at the prospect of adventure, I pulled the cart all the way up the long driveway with my left hand while nursing my right hand. Doing this, I noticed that the wheels squeaked loudly as they rotated. My two elderly carers sat on their verandah to catch a glimpse of my latest escapade. "Be careful, Michael!" Grandma yelled, as I passed them.

"Remember, Michael, there aren't any brakes," Grandad said, "so keep it on the road and that way you can run off the speed when the ground levels out!"

I waved, but had no idea what he was talking about. The fact that a six-year-old should never, under any circumstances, be allowed anywhere near such a potentially dangerous contraption unsupervised, had for some reason completely slipped their minds.

I reached the top of the driveway and decided I was brave enough to tackle the steep, dirt road. I took the reins of the billy-cart in my good hand and sat on board. I could see my foster grandparents in the distance and waved to them again. After they waved back, I slowly moved off and tried to keep the front wheels straight by using my feet on either side of the front axle. Before too long my dilapidated machine was hurtling down the slope. I began to feel panicky as I came to my senses and realised the cart was thundering down the driveway and I'd no way of bringing it to a stop. Grandad

and Grandma both jumped to their feet and were watching intently. After hitting a rut on the dirt driveway, I shot off onto the grass. At this point the billy-cart and I parted company. Flying through the air I panicked even more. Despite being the chatty child I was, I didn't know what to say, so I uttered that famous expression, familiar to young boys when things have turned completely chaotic, "Aaahhhhhh!"

It must have been quite a sight – the billy-cart going rider-less in one direction, squeaking as it went and a naive boy, going in a completely different direction, screaming as he slid across the slope on his backside. Unfortunately, I landed in a large bindi-eye patch of short, sharp spines, which dug into my buttocks and upper thighs with great tenacity. Standing up, I staggered back to my foster grandparents, clutching my buttocks as I went. With tears in my eyes, I pulled down my shorts and bent over. "Grandma, somethin' bit me on me bottom," I said.

The elderly pair laughed themselves silly. Regaining her composure, Grandma laid me on my tummy across her lap. She told me that nothing had bit me, rather I had a bottom full of bindi-eyes. Grandma pulled the thorns out one by one. "How, ouch...many, ouch...are, ouch...there in me, OUCH...bottom?" I asked.

"Oh, only a 100 or so, I suppose!"

When all the bindi-eyes were removed from my rear end I lay on my stomach on some cushions. I felt relaxed in the company of my foster grandparents and, in some ways, I felt special. I knew it would be like this when I'd finally get to be with my parents.

At the end of our time together the Ferntrees picked me up. I hugged my foster grandparents and Grandma started crying. My eyes watered as well. We all hugged each other and I reluctantly jumped into the Ferntree's car. As we drove away I waved to them and wished I was fostered with them instead of the Ferntrees.

The further we drove the more anxiety I felt about being taken back to Warilla. Life with the Ferntrees made me feel dejected and a sense of hopelessness overtook me. Once again, I longed to be with my real family.

Not long after returning to Warilla, I learned that I was being sent

to Royleston Boys' Home. Mrs Ferntree told me that Clive had to have an operation, but I've no recollection of him complaining about ill-health. Although it's hard for a young child to know the exact reasons which motivate an adult, I believed they were unhappy with me and possibly needed a break or wanted me fostered somewhere else. Despite this, I accepted that I had to move on. Although I was distressed that I was being taken away from my best friend, Trisha, I did feel a sense of relief – I'd escape the abuse of the Ferntrees.

On the eve of my leaving, Trisha snuck me over to her backyard and served up an afternoon tea to farewell me. She brought out her best plastic plates, knives and forks. Even though I didn't remember eating a single thing, the water Trisha served was brilliant. We hugged and kissed each other and said our goodbyes.

My last night with the Ferntrees was spent thinking of my family and longing to be with them. I thought of Malcolm and wondered what Patricia was like. *I bet Mummy's really bew...te...full, just like Daddy said!* I thought. *I bet she's lovely an' will really care 'bout me. I can't wait ta meet her!*

With watery eyes, but hope in my heart, I drifted off to sleep thinking about what I'd say to Patricia when I would finally meet her.