

# WHOSE RULES

THE EARLY YEARS

BIOGRAPHY

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# WHOSE RULES

## PREFACE

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Some stories are autobiographical, some stories are fictional.

'Whose rules' claims to be both and neither.

It is written from the perspective of a 62 year-old man (now 74) looking back at memories that have been repressed, forgotten, altered, with superimposed impressions and just plain mixed up.

The timeline is inaccurate, there are no records available to provide deeper research, and that's not what I want to achieve anyway.

This is the notation of things that are stuck in my head, fears and triumphs; real and unreal – thoughts and memories; exaggerated and played down.

In some ways this is the greater truth, the one I have lived with. If we cross-reference with others, I know that my repressed memories have bubbled over in places and sunk in others. So this is, what it is. During the course of this initial writing (December 2011 – December 2012) I have edited often, added anecdotes a dozen times and had so many memories flood back. It has done it's job already and only a tiny amount has leaked from my softening brain. Perhaps no-one needs to know – fair call. But I need to say it, and I can't expect anyone to sit around a campfire and listen to the ravings of an old man.

Deal with it as you will.

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Around his sixth birthday, while his parents were out, Beau and his older brother, Chris were playing tag inside the house. The object was to hit the other person with a tea-towel, the loser having to wash the dishes. Beau considered himself to be fast, agile and healthy – no-one could catch him.

The front door was open – it was the only form of air conditioning in 1950s Australia. Beau ran up the long hall that led to the outside world and freedom. The wind blew the door hard shut as he arrived and Beau went straight through the four panes of ripple glass. Apart from a nick on his shoulder, he was relatively unscathed.

These were the days before mobile phones and as a matter of fact, Beau didn't know of anyone with a home telephone either. Beau had never used a telephone, although he had seen one on a street corner and was curious about the whole idea. Television didn't exist, the people who invented the internet weren't born and life for most people was a simpler affair. The family didn't own a car, although Beau's dad had some use of a company car as he was a commercial traveler, away from home a lot.

Chris introduced Beau to Mrs. Gay, a retired nurse that lived about 3 blocks away – he had never heard of her. She was gracious enough to bathe the wound and told him to get his

parents to take him to the doctor for a couple of stitches. Beau slunk away, ran home and tried to clean up the mess on the front porch.

In due course the boys parents arrived home. Not a word was said. Beau's father just took him out to the sleep-out in the back yard and tossed him inside a cupboard. The lock slid and clicked. Beau wasn't protesting or even crying. Beau wasn't on his radar, then all of a sudden – this. The speed of his actions just confused young Beau – his father was like a footballer heading for goal. *“OK dad, I get the message – you aren't happy with me..... can I come out now, I have to pee?” Please? Pleeeeee!*

Late that night, when he had been crying for 4 or 5 hours, his mum came and got him out. She never did that again.

The front door got fixed, life went on. The daily routine was established; up in time to run to school, St Mary's Greensborough, and do battle with the swamp around the 'Yabbie Pond' or the dust bowl that attracted the snakes, depending on the season.

There was a road that went to the school, but it was circuitous and reserved for coming home with other kids. The fast way was direct, through the cow paddock (the black one was considered

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mean) and through the horse paddock, skirting the edges of the Yabbie Pond across the railway line and into the end of the school playground. There were nine barbed wire fences to negotiate, lots of sticks and stones that needed to be hurled, old bits of corrugated iron from dismembered sheds and forgotten projects and all manner of booty to collect along the way.

School was a bit boring. Beau hated having to line up and be presentable, he was a country boy and needed a bit of scruff to define the edges. He was helpful, maybe too helpful. The few photos surviving show that Beau was thin and puny but he considered myself wiry and strong – who knows?

The bright red hair, three dimensional freckles and smart ass attitude meant that he was never forgotten – it also attracted its share of scorn and ridicule. He really wasn't pugnacious, but he had learned to stand tough and sound tough – probably sounding like a yapping, miniature dog.

**Lesson learned: Stand tough, even if it pushes people away.**

A couple of friendships stuck for his Primary school years, but none lasted beyond the geographical need for someone to play with. The boys were not allowed to enter anyone else's home, and they were not allowed to invite anyone back, so most friendships were forged in a spare house lot, as boys were drawn out of a

common need to have someone kick the football between, or throw the ball back.

Football is a reminder of those early years. The family was poor in a poor neighborhood. The footballs were wadded up newspaper, tied tightly with string. Even the school football team – yes, Beau was the 'rover' in later years, always used a 'wadball' as a football, unless they were playing against another school. The school playground was next to the railway line and there wasn't a fence in the early years. The first football that ever came to school was eaten by a train. From then on, it was wadball. The fence must have gone up when Frankie got hit by the train on his way to school, not that any fence ever got in the way.

Frankie was a tiny kid with a full set of decayed teeth clinging precariously all over the inside of his mouth. He was even smaller than Beau and they sometimes banded together. Marbles, Brandy, keeping's off – that sort of thing.

They were both always voraciously hungry. They would stand beside others, with big eyes and drooling mouths, while they were eating. They often scored the scraps, just to make them go away.

Frankie and Beau were sparring one day. A quite formalized game

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of chicken where they would stand at arm's length and punch at the other one's face, with the aim of being short by a hair. It was almost like a martial art, no flinching, no hitting, just maintaining fearless control and allowing a fist to come straight for their chin. Then, one of the on-lookers pushed Frankie in the back at the critical moment. Out went Frankie's teeth – five of them in an eruption of blood.

Within a week, Frankie was dead.

To this day, Beau has never tried to hit someone in the face. he just can't do it. Thanks Frankie, you taught ... something.

**Lesson learned: Never hit someone in the face, they might die.**

Beau had already experienced the death of both his father's parents, that was back when he was a little kid of four.

Beau's paternal grandfather was always old, emaciated, tall, hunched, wizened and harsh. He had lived with the family with Beau's grandmother in the previous houses that Beau is able to remember and reportedly others before then.

The family moved into the house at Station Street, Camberwell, (Melbourne). (Later demolished for a parking lot.)

These are Beau's first recollections of home life. A large timber house in Camberwell that backed onto a lane-way had an attached

laundry (uncommon in those days) leading to an over-sized verandah which was Beau's playroom.

Beau has memories of hiding under his mother's skirt while she was folding washing in the laundry and being snuggled in between her legs, feeling the humid warmth of her body as she held him tight against her as she hummed rhythmically and rocked back and forth. It was comforting for a four year-old and had none of the sexual connotations to Beau that others spoke of in later years, but was just her way of being loving.

Her desire to give comfort had few boundaries as she got Beau to relieve how she had suckled him as a baby and rest his head in her ample cleavage, while she was quietly humming or singing lullabies, as she did when he was a baby.

Beau's father was out on the road, selling plastic ware, his grand parents were pruning trees and raking leaves in the backyard. Father and grandfather fought a lot, mainly about the meaning of the words respect and honor; grandmother sewed a lot and kept her head down, although she often cooked in the huge kitchen, gathering foods from the walk-in pantry to create an array of meals to satisfy the family. Carmel and Dennis were off at school, Chris, although only 16 months older than Beau, was almost

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nowhere in his memory, perhaps he was off at school too.

It was an old terrace style house, appearing small from the front, but large at the rear. The house had a large, raised back veranda, blackboard, and rails around. The veranda deck adjoined a large laundry, with a Bendix front loader washing machine (500 pounds then). Just inside the back door was a large walk-in pantry with shelves all the way around, no windows and a single brown light bulb.

There were times when there were visits by the O'Donnell family, Jim & Kel (Carmel) with children Gail, Dennis and Sharon.

Beau's oldest brother Dennis would test him on his homework on the back porch, using the blackboard. Their dad put together a wooden scooter from a kit on that back porch. Brother Christopher Michael and Beau would play in the lane-way at the back of the house that led to the Coles Variety store in Burke Road, Camberwell. They were able to climb up on the roof of the Coles Store and were chased away by the manager on many occasions.

Beau's first memory of going to the 'Pictures' was to see 'The Robe' biblical epic in 1953 or 1954.

Beau had memories of his 'Lamb', (plush toy) hanging on the rotary clothes line to dry after going through the washing machine.

Beau was there when Chris, fell from an (?apple?) tree in the backyard and smashing his elbow badly.

He was taken to Alfred Hospital in Melbourne for operations and cast to repair.

Their dad sold the Ford to buy a Vanguard, The younger boys would chase the 'Ice Man' up the street and feed his horse. The Ice Man would walk straight into our house with a large block of ice sitting on a hessian bag on his shoulder and go immediately to the Ice-Box in the kitchen.

There was an Italian family a few doors up that spoke no English and had no chairs in their house. We wondered if the two peculiarities were related, and they just didn't know the word for chair. Chris and Beau had their first experience of speaking in gestures.

There are emories of walking through the Camberwell Market and Coles and being embarrassed by the Store Manager again for

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being a pest and climbing on their roof etc... More memories of going into the Car Park and turning on the tail lights of cars (they all had external on switches by law, at that time.) Somebody was firing (?Strawberries?) at Dennis with a pea shooter (blow-pipe). Nana served ice-cream, but it was a chip of ice and cream from the top of the (non-homogenized) milk.

Dennis taught 4 year old Beau to write on the 6 foot square blackboard that came with the house. Beau always thought he was being forced to do Dennis' homework, but that probably speaks more of Beau than of Dennis. Hints of memories of the beautifully ornate Lady of Victories church, the ever-growing parking lots in the street, as houses were being bought up and the wanderings along the lanes and alleys at the back of the shops on Burke Road and being run off by shop keepers as he rummaged through their garbage.

There were memories of the last visitors that he ever saw enter any of the houses. Beau's mother had a girlfriend, Kel from her first job, and she was married to Jim an avid drinker who only fought with Beau's father as the evening wore on and the empty beer bottles stacked higher. One of their children, Sharon was an occasional, same age confidante to Beau, and he told her how his mother was so physically loving and nurturing, and pointed to

exactly where his mother had been so generous with her caring. Sharon was confused and upset and couldn't be stopped from telling her mother, Kel.

A huge fight broke out, and those friendships were reduced to rather formal Christmas Cards.

That house was lost when Beau's father lost his job again. He was in an apparently fragile industry and they couldn't afford to keep him on after he was found naked in his work car with other women on the third occasion and one of the other Sales Representatives reported him to work and to his wife.

Another couple of Beau's mother's friends from the early days took the whole family into their two storey home in Elsternwick (Melbourne). We move to Alice and Des O'Brien's – It was only for a few months, but Beau recalls making helicopters from a sewing pin and twisted paper, dropping them from the top of the stairway and fluttering below, getting his first crack over the head from his father and the bunker style root cellar that the family had built, long before the threat of nuclear war.

We are homeless and can't afford rent, Dad has lost his job at Moldex. Memories of a huge house, Mum and Dad upstairs,

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Mum swears she sees a ghost, Mum gives up drinking for a week.

My first positive effort to comb my own hair. I asked dad which side to part my hair, he hit me hard on the left side of my head and put me through a wall and told me never to ask again. I never asked him anything, ever again.

They were thrown out of that house when Beau's father continued to walk in to other people's bedrooms and while they were in the bathroom. His claims of being lost in such a big house finally fell on deaf ears and there was a stony silence for the last few weeks until the family moved to a shopfront with house behind, in Fairfield.

Relating to the O'Brien kids, Beau realized he was the smallest in the house, most vulnerable, but generally the most protected. He empathized with Mum & Carmel, they couldn't hit back either. He realized it was his fault for Mum being always sick, as she nearly died during Beau's childbirth. Guilt for hurting Mum, but didn't really believe it was his fault yet.

The shop was an old style Grocer/Greengrocer. Fifty or a hundred pound bags of sugar, rice, flour, and all manner of dry goods were just behind the counter along with vats of honey and barrels of

pickled things and an area for fresh fruit and vegetables. An outside shed had sacks of seeds and dried things that had no name or meaning for him. An outhouse was beside the shed, the outhouse that Dennis ran into while being chased by his father with a tomahawk. Dennis vowed never to open that door, but his drunken enraged father finally smashed through and chopped off Dennis' big toe. Dennis was nearly twelve and never forgave his father.

A small red truck came with the purchase and a daily trip to the wholesale food market was required. Beau's father was a heavy drinker and a sound sleeper, so he always arrived late at the market to get the picked over food that was barely edible. The all new Supermarkets were popping up everywhere at a time when corner stores were under siege.

The family was broke in 6 months and bankrupt a few months after that. Beau's father was never meant to run his own business, being obnoxious to anyone that came into His Shop and never taking advice from fellow shopkeepers, drove the few customers away to be scooped up by the majors.

Beau's grandfather died standing up, sweeping leaves in Fairfield a year after his wife had died in her bed at Camberwell.

It was at Fairfield that the nose bleeds started.

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After a particularly severe thrashing, Beau had another nose bleed and it was found that the other one of his ear drums had been broken. Every evening at 6 pm, just as the pub was being cleared of drinkers, and the revelers were on their way home, four year-old Beau got another nose bleed. It happened for four more months, like clockwork, like a geyser.

A return trip to the friend's house in Elsternwick for the kids was where Beau's nosebleeds finally stopped, while Beau's parents stayed at a boarding house nearby before moving to a brand new house in Watsonia three times further from Melbourne than Fairfield or Elsternwick.

Watsonia specialized in mud roads. The "War Service' home no stove or refrigerator, one light, no power outlets. Outdoor toilet, but no service to remove sewage. No furniture. We cooked outside on a campfire until a stove was finally purchased a years later, after Dad got a job at Moulded Products, later to become Nylex Corporation. Although stationed in Melbourne City, dad's job was to be a 'Commercial Traveler', a salesman on the road through country Victoria and Southern New South Wales. He would be away for two weeks at a time on differing routes in a company car. It was then that I understood poverty. We had nothing. Mum traveled into Melbourne on the train each day to

work trying to earn enough to pay the War Service loan of £17 per month. The train station was 2 miles away and trains ran sporadically. She left at 7:00 am and returned at 7pm. It was 1956 and I was just starting at St. Mary's, (Parish School) in Greensborough.

Beau had to walk to school barefoot for the first two years, so his feet toughened up. He was given a pair of hand-me-down shoes by one of the nuns after a few months, but he only ever wore them inside the school, because other family members had no shoes either.

They had no garbage service, so it was common practice to wrap scraps in newspaper and set them on fire. Tin cans were burnt, crushed and dropped into a pit at the back edge of the property line. While composting was not understood, Beau noticed that plants grew better where that had been garbage. He started with an old soft potato that had grown eyes and begun to sprout. That became the start of his garden. Within a year the sucking clay soil was beginning to be converted to a vegetable patch and the produce helped feed a nearly starving family. He was proud that he was contributing.

While their house had few amenities, it did have a chip heater for heating water and a wood fired copper. (A Copper is a washing

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machine sized copper bowl that stood over a firebox to heat water and wash clothes.) Clothes were boiled with flake soap, while a stick was used to stir the clothes. After stewing the clothes, they were transferred to the bath for rinsing, then wringing and hanging out on a rope line that ran from the house to a tree.

Six months later, Beau is riding a neighbor's bicycle down the unmade road outside his house. Recent rain had created puddles, and the small amount of traffic turned the puddles into potholes. As a 6 year-old, wearing nothing but a pair of shorts, his job was to slalom between the potholes to prove how well the bike could be controlled. He ran a ridge between two holes, the bike slid sideways into one, and he was thrown from the bike and the bike was thrown in the air. Needless to say, the bike landed firmly on Beau's bright red head. There was shock, but really no pain. Beau walked around the back of the house to where his mum was hanging out clothes, not even crying, but in need of some attention.

His mother saw him and screamed, blood was spurting from his head, creating a fountain that had entirely covered his body. He consoled her as best he could, but until he ran the hose over himself to prove, 'it's only blood, I'm not mashed up', she was hysterical.

Once again, Beau gets hauled over to Mrs. Gay, who once again, bathed the wound and pronounced that he needed to see a doctor, but this time, his mother was present. Then Mrs. Gay saw the old nick on Beau's shoulder, and asked what the doctor had done about it. Of course he hadn't been to a doctor, and there was certainly no money for that kind of thing.

Mrs. Gay wrote a note, put it into an envelope and instructed his mother to take it all along to Dr. O'Shea today. His mother's financial protests fell on deaf ears as Mrs. Gay drew his mother aside and whispered something.

They went along to the doctors immediately. Beau was seen next, as soon as the patient in the doctor's surgery came out.

### **Lesson learned: Nurses can give orders to mothers.**

Beau's mother accompanied him into the consultation room, and after a few words from the Doc, she left. The boy was ordered to strip off for an examination, because there might be problems anywhere on his body. He was really scared and shaking. He held his breath and closed his eyes as he was probed and prodded for scars, fissures and any other examples of the 'devils work'.

He needed to have a prostate exam – 'That's why we don't need your mother in here.'

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This involved a digital rectal exploration, while his penis was being stretched and rubbed. It felt weird and little tears kept burning the corners of Beau's eyes. Eventually, he was told to dress and 'not to worry my mother about what tests we had done, but you will have to be operated on'. The head wound was forgotten about until Beau started slurring words and stumbling. His mother was told not to let him out of her sight and not to let him sleep. He vomited. The pain of a migraine took over his body and he experienced his first delayed concussion.

### **Lesson learned: Pain delayed is pain doubled.**

Beau immediately burst into tears, realizing he had been taken over by the devil and that he would burn in hell for ever and ever. He was escorted back to the waiting room and then taken to the local District Hospital in a car driven by the doctor's wife. This was to be the first of a total of 43 operations on the melanoma that had formed after repeated sunburns on the wound site had gone unnoticed for the last 6 months.

The first series of operations were 'Locals', performed at the nearby District Hospital, which consisted of a day surgery and about 10 beds, mainly used for observation.

Each of these operations required the excision of the scar area and

an area immediately surrounding it. From the original one inch accidental scar there was now a four inch long caterpillar of stitches on Beau's shoulder. He kept getting weaker as keloidal tissue pushed back through the opening and a tumorous growth emerged.

### **Lesson learned: A child of the devil needs to be exorcized, regularly.**

Beau's language skills were good for a kid, but understanding the difference in meaning between 'excise' and exorcize' when both were out of his range of vocabulary and they were referred to by the learned doctor as the 'The Devil's Work' and 'Excision' in one breath... frightening.

Beau followed their every instruction to the letter to try to get the devil off his back.

Within three weeks, Beau was scheduled for Ray Treatment on the newly installed equipment at Peter McCallum Clinic, and to have chemotherapy, also in its infancy, to try to stop the re-growth. The schedule was, Chemo – Ray – Operation – Ray – Chemo.

Father is screaming about how much trouble Beau's caused the

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family. Father's drunken anger calls for him to pick up a knife to make his point and as he is waving it in Beau's face – he must have seen his own reflection. He dropped it to the table, punched Beau in his good ear, picked the semi-conscious boy up in one hand and carried him off to *The Place*.

Three days in solitude sorts out most six year-olds.

*The Place* is a closet, 2 feet by 2 feet by 8 feet tall. Beau can stand in there, he can squat into a tiny ball so that he can muffle his sobs. The smell, although foul, has become almost friendly now, it's *The Place* and no-one else ever goes in.

The closet is part of a 'sleep-out', a single room that was used by workers on the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Project that had been transported to the back of Beau's parents home in the 1950s to create extra space for the adult inhabitants of the tiny weatherboard cottage. The finish of the sleep-out is rough, creosote stained vertical weather-boards that have been nailed over tar paper. The joists are showing inside; raw, rough hardwood. The timber floor is uncovered and scarred with cigarette burns.

The room has two louvered windows, about 2 feet wide and 3 feet high. They stand aside a single door that drops down 3 feet to the ground below. A simple sad-face room with a dirty green door. There are no steps, they don't arrive for a couple of years. There are a number of variations of sawn logs on end, banana boxes that rot and later a large concrete paving stone that serves as a welcome mat, but for now, it's just climb up onto the door-sill with toes-only on firm footing and reach for the pad-bolt, slip it open and fall in.

There is no furniture, not a stick. A mattress arrives some months later. it's just a 12 ft square room. Roasting hot in Summer, mind-numbingly cold in Winter. There is a small shelf that has been tacked on under one window, just a plank of undressed hardwood, also soaked in creosote, held in place by a couple of prop supports.

*The Place* has an 18 inch wide wooden door, fitted by nickel-plated steel hinges to the closet that occupies the back corner of the room. Inside it there is a 4" nail to hang clothes on, otherwise the closet is just a scaled down version of the room. *The Place* is dark, totally dark. To guarantee darkness, the closet has a pad-bolt and padlock. There is another nail on the outside of the door.

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On it hangs the blanket that he is sometimes allowed, sometimes denied.

There is a ball of chicken-wire that lives in the closet. When he's bad, he gets rolled in the chicken-wire before being put in the closet. The chicken wire is his own folly, he brought it home one day to make cages for his beans and tomatoes and wouldn't say where it came from. Perhaps it was relocated from the scrap pile at the Chook (Chicken) Farm a few miles away, where Beau was sent weekly to get eggs - or stolen from next door.

It hurts.

The chicken-wire has a few of the corners twisted over themselves to keep it secure. Inside *The Place* there is little room to struggle, and the fear of making a noise, gouging out an eye or being subjected to other punishments was usually enough to keep him still. The cuts and pressure marks still break out to this day, 63 years later. So do the cigarette burns. Cigarettes were a pretty standard way to elicit truth and Beau was not getting any better at honesty.

Beau contemplated Crime and Punishment a lot in those days. The philosophy of a six year-old is pretty basic, but time allows all sorts of scripts to play out in the mind.

Sometimes Moochie, the Foxhound/Labrador looking mutt that hung around the house would crawl up under the sleep-out and whimper up at Beau, an inch of hardwood away. Moochie had probably been beaten too and knew the punishment corner as well as Beau did. They philosophized together as only a boy and his dog can do, and when they were able to, hugged and nuzzled for what seemed like hours on end.

Mooch understood.

### **Lesson learned: Dogs can be trusted.**

Both of Beau's parents worked, and they indulged in a standard after work ritual of the times known as the six-o'clock-swill. As all hotel bars closed at 6pm (last drinks at 6pm, off the premises by 6:15pm) it was the practice of Australian workers at the time to barrel out of their workplace and run to the closest pub and order a dozen beers which they lined up on the bar and poured down their gullets as fast as they could.

By 6:15 pm the drunks were in their cars for the peak hour crawl, along with a million others in the same state of insobriety. By 6:30 pm the effects of the beer had fully hit and car accidents were commonplace. Most police simply got off the road in the swill times, as they were checking all the pubs to make sure the

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drunks were off the premises, and, of course sampling the brew and receiving ‘fines’ simultaneously.

These were simple times. The police were there to uphold the law and they did it with an iron fist. They didn’t want to charge anyone and send them off to court, they simply bashed the living shit out of you in a back alley, took an ‘On the spot fine’ and you knew to stay out of their way. Beau’s father had been ‘done over’ a number of times at the pub – he liked to stay as late as he could and sometimes ran into the burly boys in blue.

Beau had been let out of *The Place* at around 3 o’clock on Saturday afternoon after what he believed was 3 days inside his pitch black crypt. He stumbled, and stretched and stumbled some more. He covered his eyes with his hands and dropped down from the sleep-out to the backyard.

He swayed to the outside tap and splashed water over his burning eyes and his blood encrusted nose. One of his ears was still oozing something that was more green than yellow, there was blood too, another ear drum had been burst.

His mother had always said that blood was there to wash out the bad stuff, so he guessed it just needs to bleed a bit more.

### **Lesson learned: Bleeding fixes things.**

Beau made his way into the house to wash properly, because he had fouled himself again, and he knew he would get into trouble if he smelt at the dinner table.

It was Summer, the stench was over-ripe and the sun was glaring at him, another accuser. He saw his face in the mirror and was still squinting from the bright light, even inside the house. He washed away the blood and tear stains and scrubbed himself over with a piece of rough towel. He put on a pair of sunglasses that were beside the sink and felt that he could hide behind them.

With the change in light, he walked straight into the door and the sunglasses hit, flipped and got stood on. Splintered glass, bent metal and useless. Beau picked them up and put them back onto the sink, hoping that they would self-repair as he was just too scared to own up to having broken them.

***“Did you break my sunglasses?!”***

Now he knows, he should have disposed of them, right there and then. Beau still had this wishy-washy attitude to deceit.

***“If you tell me the truth now, I won’t hit you, but if you lie to me, I’ll give you a hiding like you’ve never had before!”***

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Now the dilemma.

Does he come clean and alleviate all guilt, admit the mistake and of course admit he had been lying? Or does he hold out and protest his innocence, with the fear that one day he would be found out. All kids want their father to recognize them, want their father's love and want to be forgiven for making mistakes. He was young and naïve. There were so many games to learn and there was always a harsh punishment for trial and error. His father lit a cigarette.

**Lesson learned: Cigarette smoking makes other people tell the truth.**

The family's 'War Service' home was in Watsonia, on the outskirts of Melbourne. The home was pretty dingy in an area of pretty dingy homes. There was a neighbor. The people were from Latvia and were refugees from the Russian takeover of their country. They were nice enough, but they didn't know any English. Beyond them there were unmade house lots, soggy ground that was dotted with stands of mainly small gum trees, saplings that stood among burnt out stumps and grotesquely gnarled hollow logs, remnants of earlier bush-fires.

There was a glimpse of another house in the distance and only 3 blocks away, a grove of pine trees stood ready to explode in flames if a spark blew in. The road was not much more than a half dried creek bed, about 8 feet wide, and had stinking black oily drains on either side that teemed with inch long red wrigglers. The local kids used to say that the mosquitoes were large enough to be packaged for dog food.

The family was poor. Even at age six, Beau was in charge of the vegetable garden, and potatoes were required at every meal. The soil was a sucking mass of clay that was unyielding. He eventually got potatoes growing in enough quantities to feed a family of six. That took a willow tree to suck the water out and masses of sawdust from building sites a few blocks away. The addition of bags and bags of chicken manure, hauled in on a billy-cart from the Chook Farm five miles away, eventually did the trick. He was in production. Of all the things that he could do or not do in that phase of his life, his ability to supply copious quantities of potatoes and beans was the one thing that stood him apart as the provider.

**Lesson learned: Grow food and never be hungry.**

Beau's father was away from the house for nearly two weeks at a time. He would go on long country runs, selling the new plastic

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home-ware to gift shops and hardware stores.

Those were the quiet times.

He would roll up to the house on a Friday night after playing traveling salesman and the fights would start. Mainly it was about money. He had always lost his money at the pub before he got home. Beau's mother once burst into tears because there was no money to buy soap to wash the kids. 'It'll all be fine when your father gets back, he'll bring us some soap from one of the hotels he stays at..'. but of course he never did. He forgot the money too, although once, to his credit, he brought a case of oranges with him. Beau had never tasted an orange before and just went into meltdown.

It was about then Beau decided to make some money. At age seven or eight there were few real jobs available, being too young for a paper round (and no bicycle) and odd jobs like stacking beer bottles or digging drains for neighbors were generally kept for the older kids in the area.

There was a huge fortress like monastery about three blocks away from them, and they had groves of hundreds of pine trees.

Climbing trees was one of Beau's favorite pastimes so they all had to be gradually conquered. They were his Everest. Together

with his Latvian neighbor, Johnny, they divided up colored fabric and raced to see which of them could work their way through a row of trees with their flags on the top foot of each tree.

The very tops of the trees would sway wildly if they got their balance wrong, or if there was the slightest breeze up there, but the rush of the achievement was amazing.

After months of doing this, and falling and slipping down the layered branches a few times, usually from the very top, they figured the next extreme sport was to purposely jump from the top and cascade down the outside branches. When Johnny broke an arm, the games were banned, but Beau continued climbing the trees until all 635 trees were conquered.

So, in order to make some money, Beau would run up to the monastery's pine forest with an old piece of sheeting, and toss pine cones onto it, eventually having enough to draw into a swag and hang off a stick before commencing the trip home.

In those days, hot water came from either a wood fired copper that would have its contents bucketed into the bath or sink, or if you were rich and had a separate hot water service, it was a chip burner. Many homes still had combustion stoves or pot-bellied

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stoves as electricity was usually restricted to one or two light bulbs, often with an adapter trailing from it to power the odd electric appliance. In Beau's house, the appliance of choice was the revered electric toaster.

Dawdling back from the pine groves with his cache of cones, people approached Beau with offers to buy his firewood. The population was small, but so were Beau's arms, so fair rewards were earned for pine cones. The family was never without soap again.

Beau gradually saved up pennies and placed them in a tin along with a bar of soap. These were then hidden in the crawl space under the house, where only a scrawny boy could reach them. Beau had vowed never to be hungry or without soap, ever again.

**Lesson learned: There is always a way to make money when you need to.**

In those days, 'burning off' was very common. As there were no council rubbish pickups, household waste needed to be burned and then buried to keep the rats away. Most families had a concrete lined incinerator that could swallow all manner of refuse. Beau's family had a simple campfire style incineration

technique. This was where he learned to separate the garbage from the compost, the tins from the bottles and the paper from the decaying cooked food scraps.

The Latvians next door had, through osmosis, taught him the value of compost and with limited language, a lot of gesturing and occasional fence jumping, Beau found that the ashes when mixed with green waste and left to marinate for a while, created a healthy environment for earthworms, and this was the sign of a healthy soil.

Our family wasn't allowed to mix with the neighbors, they were not like Australians, they drank vodka, not beer, spoke funny and then the all pervading, 'We're not telling anyone about family business'.

Of course with similar age kids, and largely absent parents, they still got together and played, before the parents got home, when Beau was supposed to be peeling the spuds and preparing dinner. *"I tripped, I stood on them, I didn't mean to, I'm sorry, I lied."* Fear is an amazingly powerful tool. Having convinced himself half an hour earlier that he would never tell a living soul, that he would take the secret to his deathbed, Beau gave up without a fight at the mere sight of a glowing cigarette.

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### **Lesson learned: Cigarettes are a sign of power.**

He was ashamed at himself for having given-in at all, he was ashamed at himself for lying, he was ashamed at himself for being so clumsy that he broke the sunglasses, he was ashamed at himself for being a habitual criminal that could never be trusted, he was ashamed for disappointing his father, yet again.

### **Lesson learned: Punishment is deserved**

Sister Mary Francesca ran the local school. She was, stern, strict and intolerant and yet, there was a softness to her that Beau never understood. She was running a school of 56 kids with another teacher, Sister Mary Santa Claus (actually Stanislaus, but kids would be kids...) The pupils ranged in age from 4 to 14 and from a wide socio-economic background. There was the Publican's son, he was brought lunch each day by a waiter and sat down in the playground, picnic basket, rug, cutlery and a flask of juice. He was so far removed from reality that he was later referred to as Richie Rich. He wasn't picked on, it just seemed accepted that he needed to have things done differently.

In those days, every child was handed out a one-third pint bottle

of milk at morning recess. During summer it had always turned sour, because the crates were left just inside the gate, in the sun.

Being a naughty boy, Beau was always being summoned before S.M. Francesca and always given extra tasks. He suspected that she understood more than she said. He was always tasked to bring in the milk, go to the store (2 miles away) to get supplies or even clean up in the staff room after the two nuns had finished their lunch. There was always some tid-bit or leftover that would 'Be a sin to waste' that Beau was left with.

### **Lesson learned: If you work with food, you get to eat.**

The Parish Priest, Father Ashe, was a dour man. He was as Irish as Paddy's Pigs and almost as well presented. He muttered and mumbled with a brogue so thick, that no-one ever understood him. He also had a strong drinking ability that didn't stop at the altar wine. He was never seen to smile, and like Beau's father, he was never seen sober.

He was a train wreck.

S.M. Francesca often had huge screaming matches with him – it was always over one of the children that had been sent up to the Presbytery to help him with cleaning or other tasks. Beau never knew what those fights were about, but in a culture where nuns

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were always subservient to priests, this stood out as being earth shattering.

Beau was never allowed to go to the Presbytery, located next door to the school, even when his presence was demanded by Fr. Ashe. It was always, ‘Over my dead body’ and ‘I’ll kiss the devil first’ from S.M Francesca. Beau never discovered what the fuss was all about. In his six years at that school, he never once entered the Presbytery and he treated it as though it was a haunted house – giving it a wide berth.

Father Ashe eventually gave Beau the opportunity needed to give up Catholicism – which he jumped at.

### **Lesson learned: The soul can be used to corrupt the mind.**

The loud cracking sound inside Beau’s head was new, the force behind it was not. He literally saw stars as his head and shoulders were forced through the wall by the clenched fist, delivered like a baseball bat. He sank to the floor before remembering to never go down. Beau’s father kicked him, just once in the face, shattering teeth and ramming his head back into the wall to create a second hole in the plaster. Beau felt the black cloud of unconsciousness roll into save him from the pain, ‘*Perhaps this time I will die and not have to clean up the mess I have made*’. He awoke to the

booming voice of God.

*“Never, ever lie to me boy.*

***You are a worthless loser, you’ll never amount to anything.”***

Beau’s mother came in, and whispered the obvious to the boy, ‘*When you lie to him, it makes him angry*’. Then she ran off to pour her husband another beer, before he came after her. When Beau’s father eventually passed out dead drunk, Beau scampered up the road to see Mrs. Gay, who put a couple of tiny clips in his face, squeezed stinging lemon juice over it to kill the bugs, inspected another burst ear drum and sent him home quickly before anyone missed him. She was a godsend that was only there to minister First Aid, and when he later left his parent’s house for good, he never spoke to her again – but today, Beau swears she has a special place in his heart.

Beau was allowed to eat at dinner time, with all the family bearing witness, but this time his food was set on the floor, without a bowl. Lying dogs should eat with dogs. Beau’s damaged face and painful gums made it nearly impossible to slurp up the food, but he knew the alternative would be more punishment. Mum cried a bit at the thought of her littlest one having to grovel on the ground, but she immediately shut up when threatened. Beau’s father was a big, powerful man and his

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mother was by far the weakest person Beau had ever met.

Beau slept in a bed that night, inside the house, but his parents were arguing about him and he just knew that she was going to be hit. *'If I had only told the truth the first time, or never told the truth, maybe she wouldn't be threatened.'*

**Lesson learned : Never go back on your word, even if it's a lie.**

Beau's father would be going away the next night after dinner, so everyone attempted to lay low until he left, to stay safe. Beau knows he can't confide in his mother either. She always tells, and that usually ends up in a visit to *The Place* again. She doesn't understand that by confiding in her husband, her children are threatened.

If Beau was late for school one day, he might be locked up for another weekend. Maybe that was to give her more free time with her partner, which was impossible to understand, even in later years. Beau was told in his thirties that his mother was the one that suggested locking him in the cupboard, not just as punishment, but apparently to safeguard him from greater danger whenever his father was home. In a strange way, Beau wanted to believe that, but... he still doesn't.

Every second weekend, when his father was away, Beau would

go exploring, often with the next door neighbor, Johnny, sometimes alone. There was the hidden billabong in the Plenty River which for no particular reason, was called Bucks Dam. It was a spot to fish and swim, although the red-bellied black snakes loved the area as much as the boys. There was the aqueduct which was a largely open, man-made stream that sped along at faster than running pace. It traveled from the Yan Yean Dam, the main water supply for Melbourne, to within five miles of Beau's home.

The trick with the aqueduct was to hike and fish as far as they could walk in a day, and then strip off their clothes, tie them in a bundle and jump into the aqueduct with the bundle held above their heads. This offered them high speed transport and they only had to tread water. Sometimes their clothing got wet, but panic only set in when they were separated from their clothes and they feared having to go home naked.

Johnny and Beau would often see distant bush-fires and attempt to plot their direction and size. When they could see the flames licking into the sky, they knew it was close and threatening. On their way home, they would call into farmhouses and warn them of the fires. In those days, this simple bush telegraph was a necessity as there was no other means of communication.

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Beau goes to church most Sundays, it's a way to get out of the house and as there is rarely any real curfew, he usually dawdles aimlessly, plotting his escape, *'They'll miss me when I'm gone'*, says the 'poor me' in him.

Sometimes his mother comes to church with him, his father never does. Today, Beau's mother is wearing hand me downs from her twin sister. Twinny is wealthy, married to another bitter twisted man, but bites her tongue too. It's not Christian to say anything bad about your husband.

Beau's mother has a hat on as they walk the four miles to the church. His Sunday shoes, tied together, are looped over his shoulder, one in front, one behind, socks stuffed into his pocket. The mud along the roadway will ruin shoes, and it might be another year before he can wear his brother's cast offs.

One of the other kids from school sees him bare-footing it toward the church and calls a few names, and in front of his mother too. There's a water tap near the entrance to the church where Beau rinses his feet and finishes dressing while his mother dabs at her shoes with a handkerchief.

They go inside. The Mass is in Latin and Beau has already been instructed in some of the meanings of the prayers. It seems so surreal to him, there is all this talk of love, while people he knows are plotting to leave their families, beat their children and abuse their neighbors. The full irony of an hour of platitudes doesn't yet strike home to him. Everyone is on their best behavior, but he notices that his mother never talks to anyone, she keeps her head bowed the whole time. She asks her son to sit on the other side of her. It's not until they swap places that Beau sees her bruised and puffy cheek and the black eye that cheap makeup can't hide. She rattles his arm and says, *'You pray for forgiveness for what you have done to me.'*

He looks down at his shoes, rough, but clean and wishes the floor would swallow him up.

He thinks of the Page family. He was a builder in the area. He was tough and hard as nails. His kids were always damaged and battered. Then Beau found out Mrs. Page had taken to her husband with a hammer in the middle of the night and was in jail on murder charges. Somehow she got off, but was never allowed to enter the church again, presumably because the priest had not seen her at confession. The kids moved from the Catholic school to the state school and Beau rarely saw them again.

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Beau's mother went to communion at the head of the row, came back to her seat, grabbed him and her handbag, and headed out the door before the Mass was over. Her eyes were red with tears. Beau with shoes off, they arrive back home, not a word spoken.

**Lesson learned: I know how much harm I have done, I can't undo it – I'm powerless, beaten.**

Without saying anything to anyone, Beau goes straight back to *The Place* and sits in there, no wire, door open, but safe in his sad world.

Later, his father comes to the door,

***'What are you doing in there?'***

*'I forgot to ask God's forgiveness.'*

The door to *The Place* slammed and the darkness closed in – but Beau had won – He's not in the chicken wire at all. Perhaps his father will forget about it.

In the darkness, Beau carefully lifts the wire up and hangs it on the nail above his head giving him more space. As he lifts it, he hears a strange flapping sound. He feels around to find the 18 inch square of linoleum floor covering is loose underneath him. It has been nailed in place, but over time and probably his own shuffling, the nails have all pulled through. He's able to stand on

the wall support that is an inch higher than the floor, and lift up the linoleum. He can see shards of daylight through the gaps in the floorboards. It smells pretty bad under there, probably from his own pee, but there is a puff of fresh air every few seconds that makes his heart beat faster.

He resolves to replace the lino and say nothing until he has found a way to make better use of this eureka moment.

Before dinner, Beau's father pulls him out of *The Place* and tells him to wash up. He's drunk, but he doesn't seem aggressive. Beau's subdued, compliant and not looking for a beating. He asks his son what he is going to tell them at school about the missing teeth and Beau responds with the required lie.

*"I was playing and fell out of a tree and must have hit a rock".*

*"Have some dinner."*

**Lesson learned: Lying is OK to protect your family, but not okay to protect yourself.**

So after a few extra lies to the nuns when he returned to school, some bragging rights to the other boys – *"You oughta' see what I did to the other guy!"* and a few whispers from his siblings, that episode went away, his Father went back out on the road and his mother went off to work, smelling of way too much cheap

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makeup.

To everyone else, Beau fell out of a tree. The ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy was firmly in place at the family home, and he realized that while he was the current whipping boy, all the other children had been the primary focus at some time or another.

### **Lesson Learned: Survival meant silence, failure was terminal.**

With his father away, out came play. Even though Beau’s mother would tell her husband everything, there was that magic time between 3:30 pm when school let out and 6:45 pm when Beau’s mother rolled in. Sometimes there was a sibling around, sometimes not.

There was a garden shed at the very back of the yard. It was a reclaimed packing crate for an imported car. It was naturally ventilated with 1/2 inch gaps between the palings. These were the days before containers, when over-sized wooden crates were cheap and plentiful. There were a few building sites within a mile or so. It was easy to wander onto the sites and pick up scrap timber and nails that had fallen during the building work. On the way home from school Beau grabbed a few pieces of timber and a whole bunch of nails, he also got some paint tin lids – but he had always collected them.

Paint tin lids were quite simply the original Frisbee. The local boys had paint tin lid wars with each other – 8 inch metal disks flying back and forth until someone ended up in tears. A great game. This time, Beau took the builder’s booty back to the garden shed and left it there – then inside to peel the spuds, and slice the tripe.

Tripe is the only food stuff that can be mistaken for whitewall tires (remember them?). Kids were told that tripe was ideal for youngsters, because growing children needed meat and that was the best there was. It was diced into one inch blocks, and boiled forever before being served with a white sauce that was flour and milk. It created a globulous, gelatinous mass that always made Beau gag, but had to be eaten to keep his strength up.

After years of this, Beau finally figured out that bread squares, soaked in white sauce looked similar enough to tripe, to be able to pull a sleight of hand when it came to his plate.

He wolfed down the slurry before anyone could notice the difference – more for them, none for him. Beau’s health picked up immediately as he left tripe behind. These days, it’s the one food he refuses, still. He passes it off as ‘A Fashion Statement’ and lets it go – but it always makes him shiver.

**Lesson learned: Stealth and deceit are a good thing.**

When Beau's father was home, he always ate steak. He always ate potatoes and he always drank beer. 3 meals a day, seven days a week, he ate steak and potatoes, although he was rarely seen to drink beer before noon. The family had to feed him steak because he was the 'bread winner' and men needed to have their red meat. Beau's mother worked too, but in those days, women's wages were a third of men's, so they didn't need to be fed so well and women were obviously less important.

**Lesson learned: There is a pecking order that can never be questioned.**

The myxomatosis virus that was released to combat the rabbit plagues throughout Australia, were starting to close in on the local area, but that didn't stop young boys from spearing and even netting the tasty rodents. They quickly learned about the look of a Myxo rabbit and only used them for skinning contests, while those that were unaffected were kept for the pot. This was the red meat supplement and Beau's father wouldn't dream of eating them, '*Give me a steak any day*' – so for at least 6 months of the year the rest of the family had a good chance of having rabbit on the menu once or twice a week.

After a time, hunting became an art-form, and Beau's neighbors invested in some ferrets. They made a big coop to keep the ferrets in and covered it in chicken wire. The roll of chicken wire was endless, so that's when Beau had decided to cut himself a length and hide in his sleep-out, he had no idea, he had been instrumental in creating his own torture chamber.

Mushroom Harry was a local character that lived an extraordinary life. He had an air rifle and lived on rabbits and mushrooms, or at least that's how it worked out in Beau's head. In the forests of the grounds of the Gresswell Sanitarium were a few abandoned car bodies that Harry had set up as his home. Over the years Harry had gathered junk that had been hurled out of cars in those days before rubbish collections. His hoard was neither an artistic statement nor of any utilitarian nature, it was just his stuff.

Johnny's mum worked at Gresswell and knew the story. Harry had been an inmate of Gresswell and had been ordered to never leave the grounds. That order stuck. He had been dragged back into the dormitories kicking and screaming too often. They finally let him just sleep in the woods. Beau and his friends had a fear of Harry, he was as mad as a hatter and they were young and freaked out by his living conditions.

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In summer he was naked and they giggled as they watched him through the dense scrub. In winter he had on a huge army great coat, gum boots and an old army slouch hat, with varying amounts of rags underneath. At an early age, the boys discovered Harry talking to himself, swearing at everything, rambling. He was not a subtle man. They saw him keep walking up to one tree and then another like a sentry on duty, barking orders or having an animated conversation with each of them.

The boys decided to play a trick on Harry. They would bring things to one of his favorite trees for him to discover and then see what he would do. Harry wasn't to see the boys, and it took all their courage to venture into his realm. Many double-dares later and either Johnny or Beau would leave a bottle of Slades Lemonade or a pack of cigarettes under his tree. He was really suspicious and would watch to see what was going on, so then they would leave something at one of his other perimeter trees.

Over a period of five years, they left Harry all manner of things from fishing poles to an armchair, from clothes to rations. He was their Smith Family, and they got a great kick out of not being discovered. Harry left things by the trees, which the boys decided were for them to disappear for a few days and then magically

return them. A couple of matchbox cars, a little whistle, various pieces of wood. They never met face to face, but Harry knew as much about the boys as they knew about him. They returned his toys and left their treasures for him. This was the start of a number of hidden relationships that Beau forged over the years.

Bush-fires went through the area, Harry couldn't leave. He perished alone in the grounds of the asylum. After discovering him, the boys never went back, it was like a shrine that needed to be left for Harry, and he wasn't returning. Bush-fire is not an easy death. Harry had bloated and swelled where he lay, half underneath one of his car bodies.

**Lesson learned: Death can be easier than life.**

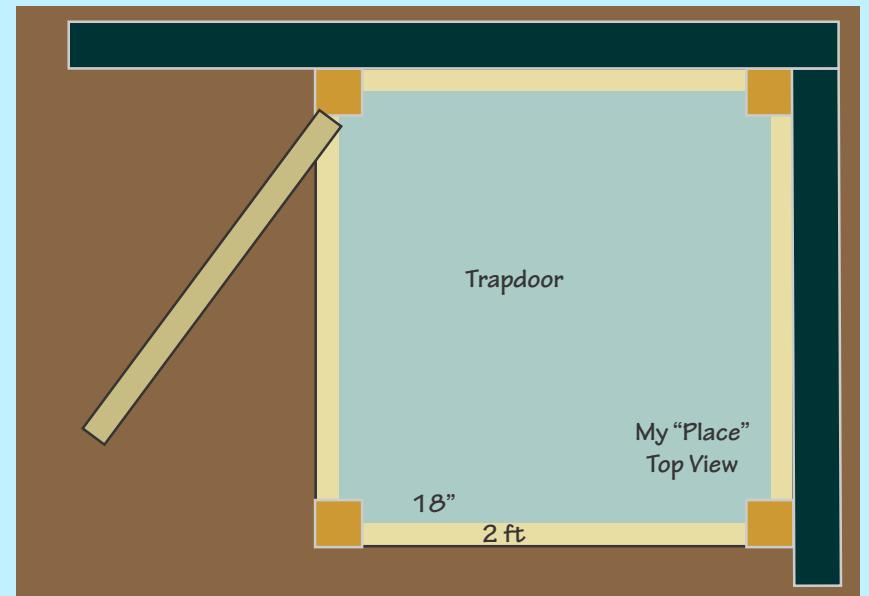
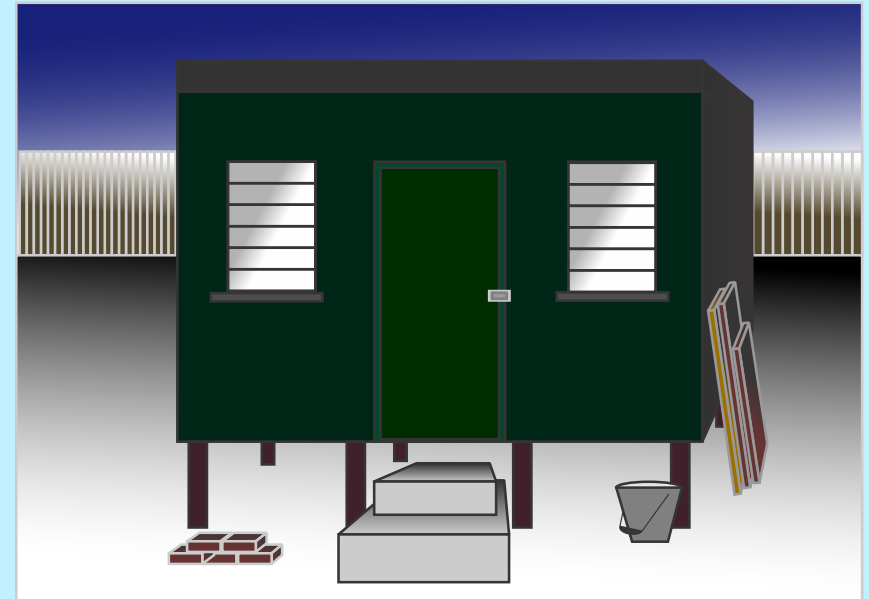
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Each day Beau rushed home from school and straight to work in the shed. This time he took a piece of string and a knife. He returned to *The Place* and measured beyond the piece of linoleum to the wall supports that he had previously stood on, and cut one string to its length, the other to its width. He ran back out to the garden shed and began piecing together timber slats until he had recreated the flooring of *The Place* complete with extra size, so that it would fit firmly on top of the linoleum. A little jiggling, hacking with a saw and the size was right. He took the floor back into the shed, and poured oil all over it and then buried it in the mud. Beau had never tried building anything before and marveled at the patterns made out of the bent nails as he learned the craft from scratch. But for now, time to go inside and peel the spuds.

After a week of running backwards and forward from the shed to *The Place*, he had recreated flooring that he was sure would pass inspection for age, roughness and color.

He carefully lifted the lino out of the closet, placed the new false floor into place and then replaced the lino. The floor inside was now raised by 1/2 an inch, but otherwise it was identical. He covered all his tracks in the garden shed, burying sawdust in his garden beds and hiding spare nails and then to leave it all alone until his father had seen it. Beau had no intention of showing it to



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him, he just wanted it to pass inspection unnoticed, before he went any further.

It went unnoticed.

Now came the task of making a false ceiling.

The door was short, maybe five feet tall and the ceiling in the Place was eight feet tall. He wondered if anyone would notice if he brought it down a little.

The ceiling was tar paper, which he sliced with a razor blade until it fell. There was nothing above it at all, other than rafters and a corrugated iron roof – it was merely looped in place. Before threading some unwound pieces of fine chicken wire through the corners of the tar paper, he used the tar paper as a template for the false ceiling. Then he was able to replace the ceiling temporarily.

By using the template to measure, Beau found a piece of Masonite that was almost the exact size. The boy test-fitted the Masonite and marked the upright supports at about 9 inches below the ceiling. He counted the supports and went back to the shed to cut some blocks. After cutting, they were soaked in oil and then buried in dirt to age appropriately. Back to peeling spuds.

Over the next few weeks, whenever he had a private moment, he

worked on his project. The ceiling tar paper was now glued to the Masonite, which was sitting on small blocks that were in turn, nailed to the support joists in the Place. To remove the false ceiling, it needed to be lifted and tilted slightly, then it would come free. Now, the time had come to work on the floor again.

Home alone, Beau lifted out the false floor and broke through the original floor with a tomahawk. Once there was space, he inserted a saw, and took out the whole of the square closet floor. He disposed of the old floor pieces under the house, rasped at the newly cut edges to smooth them, and applied oil and dirt to the newly sawn edges. They disappeared into the general character of the woodwork. He then simply lifted the new, over sized floor into place and it was supported by the wall joists.

Standing back, nothing had changed. Inside, it felt no different, but now he knew, he would never be a prisoner forever – he had made a trapdoor.

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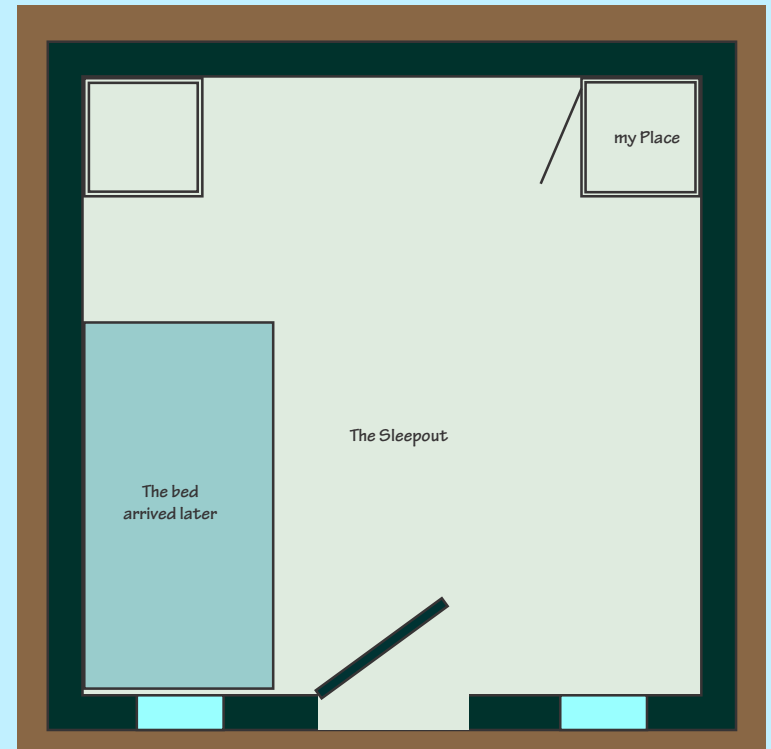
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There had been a constant fear in Beau's mind that he may be locked in the Place and his parents would go out drinking and be killed in a car crash or that a bush-fire would follow the smell of smoke that often wafted on the summer winds, causing him to quietly starve to death or burn like Mushroom Harry. This fear was gone forever.

**Lesson learned: Bottom line, you have to have control over your own life.**

Over the next few months Beau was sent to *The Place* regularly, but now, just before his eighth birthday, he had created the tunnel to freedom. He was too scared to use it at first, but eventually he vowed never to soil himself again. He readied the space by clearing junk from directly below the drop zone under *The Place* so that he could move about in the dark if necessary without being cut or making a noise. As the family gardener, he had a number of planter boxes that covered the underneath of the sleep-out on stilts, so he made sure there was a simple push at a small wooden box that covered the drop zone.

Beau set about making his tool-kits. He made sure he had a similar size piece of chicken wire in the ceiling cavity, and was able to find a couple of cans of sardines, small and flat and with their own key, a bar of soap, a candle, pliers, matches and of all things, some underpants. Other items he stashed under the house, or buried in the garden shed included a screwdriver, a penknife, a length of rope and another box of matches. Over the next months, the various stashes around *The Place*, under the house and in neighboring front yards grew. He



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became increasingly aware of his surroundings. Beau really didn't want to live there any more. Beau was sad that pride in his work could not be shared with anyone.

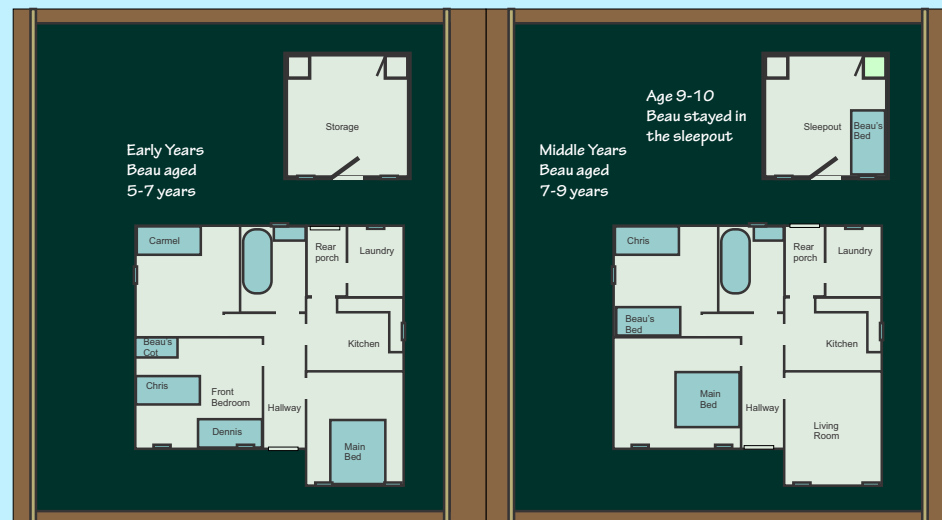
**Lesson learned: Everyone will give you up rather than get hurt.**

These stashes were his personal secret, perhaps the first of many. Now that he was able to get away from his prison, he would wander the neighborhood in the dead of night. That's when he learned a little too much for an eight year-old.

Beau had progressed from Local Anesthetic operations to General Anesthetics. He went from scarred to immobilized as the operations cut deeper, the Chemo got wound up and the Roentgen of the Ray Treatment increased. He spent more and more time in hospital seeing less and less people. His parents never visited beyond the original sign-in and final bail out; the hospital was not

on the way to the pub. Beau was isolated and felt no-one really knew where he was apart from his parents, he had just disappeared like the siblings before him.

By the time he was 10, Beau's life expectancy had grown from 6 months to 2 years. He gave himself credit for this, although he knew the good doctors and nurses had definitely played their part. He was now on the Outpatients Register and was able to make his own way back and forward from home to hospital. He did a few weeks at school, and was given some work to take home, but his focus was elsewhere. In fifth grade Beau came bottom of the class, but in sixth grade, he turned everything around, came dux of the school, won a 100% scholarship to the best Catholic College in the state and had a lot to live for, but still only 2 years to live.



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As he left *The Place* one weekend evening, he saw a light on in the bathroom. The bathroom window faced the rear of the house and the front door of the sleep-out. The bathroom window was frosted glass, but it was obvious that two people were inside.

Caught between fear and guilt, Beau crept closer and heard the rough drunken mumble of his father whispering and his sister, whimpering. He couldn't fathom what was going on at that stage, he simply had no clue. His sister Carmel was 13 and he only knew that she must have been getting into trouble. Beau was very short of bravery and simply went back to *The Place* and sobbed for her.

### **Lesson learned: Everyone is scared.**

Beau realized how separated each of the kids were. One had left home, and Beau was a virtual stranger to a brother and sister that shared the same house as he did.

Beau's closest sibling, Chris, had an identical sleep-out, but his was a lined, painted bedroom, not a punishment chamber. He never did anything wrong, never got into trouble, and simply sold Beau out at every chance. He looked like his mother's father and for some reason, that gave him the status of the fair haired child. He was 16 months older than Beau and simply never got hit. The boys' sister lived in the main part of the house. She had her own

room, never got beaten, but was always timid and shy around people. She was a regular churchgoer, beautiful and radiant young lady, but she could never look anyone in the eye.

Carmel made school holidays so special for Beau on a couple of separate occasions. She played a game, hiding notes around the house and even outside in the yard, creating a form of treasure hunt. The prize was always simple, everyone was poor, but the fun was in the fact that she cared. She moved out of the house to live with neighbors and then was magically getting married although she'd only ever been on a couple of dates.

This loving behavior of hers was seen to be some sort of repayment for having interrupted dad while he was abusing her. Beau had made it his business to barge into the bathroom whenever he heard her crying. Father swore he was just washing her in the bath with him, but she was in tears, 13 or 14 years old and forced to be naked. It wasn't until Beau was 35 years old that Carmel gave him the complete run down – because at the time of the abuse, Beau was pre-pubescent and had no knowledge of sex other than sniggering at a bare bum.

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Between the ages of 18 months and 16 years, their father sexually abused, molested and raped Carmel. At one stage Carmel quit school to be the house mother to look after Beau between medical treatments, after school and during school vacations.

Their mother could earn more money because of her age and life experience. During that time, their father would come home every day for lunch and rape Carmel. It was as regular as morning coffee. She would beg him to stop – he never did. When Beau was well enough, he intervened. Carmel, ashamed that her little brother knew too much and wearing her own guilt inappropriately, left home to live with a family who had a daughter at Carmel's old school and they were obviously aware that Carmel needed to be saved from her own family.

Carmel arranged to stay with the Patterson's, who lived near St. Mary's School / Church. Their daughter, Nola, played on the same Netball team. Beau rarely saw Carmel after that, although she was only two miles away. She never came back to stay in the family home. She lived with the Patterson's until she was married at 17.

That was when their father taught Beau about sex – the hard way.

The sleep-out now had a mattress on the floor and a few extra nails in the wall supports so it could act as Beau's bedroom. Apart from being the room where *The Place* was, it was also the room where Beau could have some degree of privacy, and went there often to cry himself to sleep. His father caught him crying in there, probably about the fact that Carmel had moved out and was now 'disowned' by the family.

His punishment was to be anally raped "*Because you should have something to really cry about*".

The physical pain and emotional fear that the little boy had, instantly changed to hatred. Although too young to understand sex, there was a guilt associated with anything to do with privates, nudity and touching that was indoctrinated through home, school, church and neighbors that made him realize this was not right, not even for a father who owned his mind and body.

Who could he tell? Not his mother who would report back to him; not his brother, Chris who was left untouched and treated like gold; not his sister Carmel who was finally safe and living away from home; not his oldest brother Dennis, who had now joined the Navy as an apprentice to get away from the terrible

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punishments he received; not the Doctor who now had a reputation of playing with all the children in the neighborhood and definitely not the Parish Priest.

No-one.

There were no phones, two absent Latvian speaking neighbors and the internet wasn't invented. There was no-one to appeal to.

**Lesson learned: Sex is dirty, hateful, overpowering, painful, demeaning and shameful.**

Carmel never came back to save Beau, never came round to take him away for a weekend, never bothered, but she was 'safe' at last.

**Lesson learned: Once you get away, never look back.**

Then, a couple of years later, Chris left also.

Beau was now silent, cowed and alone with a madman that was hell bent on destroying him. Beau was bright at school, too bright and with a warped sense of humor. He was in people's face all the time, challenging them and began to get into all manner of

scrapes. The lessons learned at home weren't as valid in the real world. 'The Christian Brothers will sort you out in no time!'

Like so many baby faced cherubs that went to Christian Brothers Colleges, he was raped. In the name of Jesus he was raped. He felt shame, fear, anger and revulsion at what was happening to him, he was a pawn, he was 10 years old and he had nowhere to go.

Once again, Beau couldn't tell his family... they wouldn't believe him, or would somehow have twisted the blame on to him. He couldn't go to the priest – Fr. Ashe was now well known for his misdeeds around the parish. The local Doctor forced everyone to have internal exams for the common cold, and the police just took you out and bashed you, then would tell your parents you started something so they finished it.

He didn't know anyone with a telephone, he was lost in his own world. Simply nowhere to go. Beau vowed that he would never be in that position again – but everything had to change for him to take charge of his life. Alone with tears, he set a time-line of 3 months to get some money together and leave.

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He roamed the streets at night, practicing survival skills including stealing the coins that were left out for the milkman. He organized a raffle of a chicken, saying it was for a local school, selling tickets from a blank book he had bought from the Newsagents.

There was no chicken, just the cash from tickets sold. He jumped the back fence of the Milk Bar, stealing their lemonade bottles that were waiting to be exchanged for new ones, then brazenly walking in the Milk Bar's front door and cashing in the bottles.

When the Bottle-O drove his horse and cart from house to house to pickup beer bottles for recycling at 2 for a penny, Beau would direct him to all the biggest drinkers houses, and get paid for selling bottles that weren't his. He was eleven, out of control, on a mission and a street thief, a rich one. He had more than 20 pounds, he could survive.

Beau wanted to catch up with a couple of the kids he had gone to the Christian Brothers' College with, as he had just thundered out of there and never returned. He wondered what was being said, but had his suspicions. Beau decided to catch up with them at Mass on Sunday.

While he was still about a mile from the church, an horrific car accident happened. The car was heading toward the church, and ran off the road into a power pole, disintegrating. He stayed with the dying people until another car came along, then left to run to a nearby house that had a telephone. The second cable coming from the power pole was the give-away sign of a telephone service, and as this was a richer area than where he lived, it only took a few minutes to get to a house, break-in, use their phone to call an ambulance and head back to the accident scene.

Other passers-by had arrived and needed to shield him from seeing the full gravity of the tragedy, so he went on to church, to pray for their souls. He was late, the service was well under way, but he had done his civic duty.

Beau entered the rear doors of the church, and commenced the walk down the aisle, looking for a free seat, or more likely a friendly face, when the pulpit erupted in the maniacal raging of Fr. Ashe's hatred of people who didn't love God enough to be on time. He belittled Beau, and ordered him from God's house. He had been unofficially excommunicated by one of the least godly men that he knew of.

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Beau walked quietly from the church, remaining composed – at least until he got outside – then ran back to the car accident, realizing what was more important to him. The hypocrisy of organized religion has never eluded him since that day.

**Lesson learned: Hypocrisy and religion are synonymous.**

Someone dobed; the chicken raffle had come back to haunt him, because an eleven year-old kid with a shock of bright red hair had been trying to sell them phony tickets. Beau's father was at the front door with a stranger, yelling at Beau for blood, while his mother was at the back door, begging Beau to just Go.

He went.

**Lesson learned: Never stay where you aren't wanted, and figure it out before you've wasted eleven years.**

Little has been said of their mother... there is little to say – she simply wasn't there for her children. She clucked and hugged them arduously, but always pushed them away if their father was around.

Beau graduated from St Mary's Primary School at age 10 after skipping two separate years and was accepted at Christian

Brother's Preparatory College in Alphington (Melbourne) on a full scholarship. He was the youngest and smallest kid in that school and got dubbed 'The Professor'. Most of the other students came from money. Beau had just started wearing shoes full-time. The school was a 20 minute walk from either Darebin or Alphington station, then the 5 to 30 minute wait for the sporadic train ride which was another 30 minutes and the walk from Watsonia station to our house was another 30 minutes. School finished at 3:40pm, so it was not unusual to get home at 5:15 or later.

This was the time to prepare the evening meal. As both parents were stationed in Melbourne Central, and finished work at 5:00 pm they usually came home together, either by train or company car. Working out the timing for the serving of dinner was essential, as dad would be upset if dinner wasn't ready when he walked in the door. Of course the stopover at one of the pubs that were on the way home was essential. They usually stopped close to Melbourne City, so they could get as much drinking time as possible before the pubs closed at 6pm. That meant they would sometimes fall asleep on the train and miss their stop, or drive miles out of their way to avoid police stops. They were normally home by 7pm, but that could stretch to midnight if they met someone at the pub and went back to their place for a session.

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Just before Beau left, his mother told him a couple of family secrets. There was another brother, Laurie and that he had been institutionalized from an early age, because of a head injury. It was many years before their mother admitted their father had been jealous of a 6 month old baby that was in his bed when he came back from Military Service.

There is no admission, just an opportunity to draw the conclusion that their father had mistreated Laurie and the ensuing brain damage meant that Laurie was legally blind, legally deaf, had an IQ of around 70 and was so spastic that he only stumbled with the aid of a walking frame. Laurie had a vocabulary of around 50 or 60 words, was never fully toilet trained and could barely find his mouth to feed himself.

It wasn't until a chance discussion with Dennis, that the truth of Laurie's affliction had come out. Dennis obtained Freedom of Information medical files, notarized affidavits from doctors and records of treatment that all related to the fact that Laurie was the first child of the family to be thrown through a wall. The Doctors at the time documented a Domestic Accident, but mandatory reporting was not a requirement, so it was kept quiet as all dirty little secrets were supposed to be.

Laurie was living in Sunbury about 40 miles away in an

institution that was also (rightly) known as 'the zoo'. The conditions were horrific, the zookeepers worse. Reports of the results of bestiality and half man – half sheep were not unbelievable when seeing the inmates crawling around outdoor cages in rags, misshapen, putrid and shrieking. There was no relief from the terrifying misery of these creatures of a lesser god.

Laurie's life didn't get any better when he was transferred to another establishment at Ararat.

Beau knew one of his tasks would be to track Laurie down and spend some time with him.

As his now estranged brother Dennis wrote when recounting his own story, "*And she held his coat*" should be written on their mother's tombstone.

It was Summer, January 1961. A week before Beau's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The fights were bad. His dad had a 'blue', a fight with Jim O'Donnell. They were both drunk. Jim always drank scotch and dad always drank beer. Dad drank so much beer that the Bottle-O made special trips to collect the empties for recycling. As always, Beau pocketed the recycling change from the Bottle-O and had

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been adding any spare money he could to his savings. He kept the cash in a small cigarette tin. The tin was buried in the front yard of the house next door. It was his 'mad' money.

In the middle of the fight that Jim and Dad were having, mum came to Beau and said, “I'm begging you to leave, if you don't leave now, I'm sure he's going to kill you..”

Dad had beaten Beau often – Sometimes he would say, “You deserve a good thrashing, ” and then stalk around the house looking for his weapon of choice. Sometimes he was too drunk to do a lot of damage, but he was still able to rupture his eardrums often enough to cause permanent hearing loss in both ears.

His mother Mum pressed a One Pound note into Beau's hand.  
Go, Now!!

He gathered the few possessions he really needed and left,

So within 3 minutes of Beau's mother telling him to go, he was officially launched... No more church, no more home, no more family, no more hospital, no more tripe – he was on his way.

Later that night he crept back home, into *The Place* via the

trapdoor and slept more soundly than he ever had. In the morning, when his parents had gone out for the day, he crept into the house, took all he could fit into his school-bag and left. He never returned to that house, there are probably still sardines imprisoned in the ceiling of *The Place*.

Thirty years later Beau did call in to see his parents again, in their retirement village unit. He wanted his own children to be able to say that they had met their grandparents. They stayed 15 minutes, everything was hypocritical smiles in front of the children and then everyone moved on to ‘another appointment’.

He knew suburbs and stations on their train line, but his knowledge stopped at most of the station names. They had been blurs in his life, traveling to school or doctor's appointments in the City.

His circle of acquaintances was tiny, his social skills were non-existent and his funds were ridiculous. Then he asked himself the question that seemed to lead to the answer for everything from that point on.

What would a caveman do?

It seemed to answer everything. Survival, Don't be preyed upon, stay out of sight, be quiet, aim for food and shelter so that there

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would be another day to find a better question, a better answer.

Good days were marked by good food and not being seen.

The city and suburbs were teeming with people and my distrust of humanity was at its peak. Beau wanted to head for the country towns where he was sure to be unknown. He worried about schooling and how he would be able to get an education if he was miles away. It would be another month until school restarted in early February. His mind raced between the anonymity of the country towns and the possibility of anonymity of the city. He knew it would be difficult to earn a living wage at his age and his size was somewhere between puny and frail. But it was school vacation time, so many younger kids were getting minor part-time jobs without their age being questioned.

For the next month Beau worked as a part-time short order cook at Hamburger Max's in Sandringham. The hours were tough: 6:00pm until 3:00am. 7 days a week.

Max, whose real name was Joe, let him sleep in a room at the back of the shop. The shop front faced the beach and the blazing sun made the afternoons sheer hell. The main hotplate was in the shop window so that passing foot traffic could see food being

prepared. This was before air-conditioning was available in small businesses, so the patrons had no idea that their hamburger with the lot was being cooked in the dripping sweat of the cook. The money was amazing, the food was free and they always cooked for each other, rather than cook their own. All food and drinks were free, so expenses were zero.

The business next door was a Shell Service Station. They needed a pump attendant to open up at 6am each day. They didn't pay as well and there were no freebies, but Beau could certainly walk next door to open up for them and after the first day, he was given the 6am to 6pm shift. That was also 7 days a week, which he was able to keep up for the month. Beau retired on the first day of school with a really powerful nest egg.

School was strict about uniforms, hair length and all the details that were designed to evoke conformity and conservative Christianity. He needed a haircut. He had never cut his own hair and never been to a hairdresser, as that had always been a family affair. Although haircuts were cheap in those days, Beau bought a pair of scissors and cut his own. He just kept cutting until it stopped sticking up. The school was not impressed.

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By this time Beau had been able to rent a room from a true slum landlord. This was in the back of a terrace house in Alphington, about a mile from the school. The room was sparse but it came with a bed and a chest of drawers. The bathroom/laundry was outdoors and used by two others.

As an eleven year-old walking the streets with only minimal concepts of direction, Beau was a target. He had to get off the street, but there was no-one to trust, and he was by now a wary little boy. He had a small address book that had a few names in it, but had no concept of how to get to their homes and wasn't sure if he would be welcomed, as an embarrassment or returned to his private hell.

Hitchhiking was a standard method of transport in those days, but there were still many times that Beau told the driver that he was on his way home from martial arts lessons. A few times he jumped out of a moving car, a couple of times he was groped, once he was driven out into the bush and dumped.

Beau pictured himself leading the life of Mushroom Harry, squatting somewhere and beating off anyone that came by.

**Lesson learned: There were many more lessons to be learned.**

Hitting the road was a huge move for Beau, he had rarely ventured out of his semi-rural hometown, having only distant memories of other places that he had been taken to as a rear seat passenger and had little-to-no interaction with anyone other than his immediate family and a few of the kids from school. He had seen hitchhikers and knew this was his ticket to freedom.

He scored a railway timetable from one of the suburban stations and that gave him a map of the suburbs and the direction of the regional centers he had heard of, but had no knowledge of.

Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Mildura all had images in his mind, perhaps from old photographs that used to adorn railway carriages he had seen, perhaps from his own healthy imagination. This was his time to find out.

He made up his mind to keep away from the police and anyone that might send him back to his parents' home. He was aware that he would stand out like a sore thumb if he hitchhiked late at night, so he decided to always look out for a place to stay, whenever it started to get dark. His Railway Map had no indication of main roads and highways, so he was at a loss to define addresses to those people who picked him up. That's when he worked out that he needed a bunch of stories to keep him free.

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*“I got kept in after school and I missed my train home to Ballarat”,* the first story began.

The stories got better, but the basis was always that he was going ‘home’, not running away. People were always helpful to someone on the way home, well nearly always. Plotting a route became more involved. Beau would go to the Post Office and look up a real address in the next country town, then he could quote a street name. He would usually arrive at his ‘home’ town in the mid afternoon, and as he was being driven through town, he would shout *“There’s mum! She’s just at Aunty Joan’s shop – Can you drop me off here?”* That would get him out of the car in the middle of town, without ever having to go to the house address, where the driver might be tempted to see him in, or wait for him to enter before driving off.

**Lesson Learned: Having a destination makes you seem grown up.**

Over time, Beau found out that he could work with the horse drawn bread or milk delivery drivers without any question. If any kid was enterprising enough to get up at 2 or 3 am to start work, there were no questions asked about family, age or status – just

another kid to be a runner for them, lift crates and ‘*hold the horses*’.

All the larger regional towns had dairies or bakeries that were ideal for a kid to earn a very minimal wage, and he was probably paid from the driver’s pocket, not by the company. The ice deliveries were too heavy for him, but there were soft drink, firewood, coal and other deliveries, that a boy could be a part of without having to have a driver’s license. In those days the night-soil and garbage collections were rumored to be manned by ex-convicts and Beau was scared to ask them for work.

Most of the casual labor was available on farms. Before he was twelve, Beau had the opportunity to deal with every manner of farm animal, mainly through ‘mucking’ stables, ‘dagging’ sheep, cleaning hen houses, and milking cows, as well as mending fences, distributing baled hay to cattle and shooting rabbits to feed to the cattle dogs that were always fenced in away from the main house.

Then of course there was fruit picking. The back breaking manual tasks of being out in the fields, hunching and stretching, picking citrus, grapes, stone fruits, cabbages, lettuces, carrots or whatever – long before machine harvesting had changed the 3000 year old industry.

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By age 13, Beau had driven all manner of farm tractors, flatbed trucks and paddock cars... those old wrecks with the bodies torn off and no hood or doors and used as a Private Property carry-all in the same way as ATVs are today.

**Lesson Learned: Being able to drive makes you employable.**

Then along came the family from Weirdsville to give him a lift. Mum and Dad Weirdo were in the front seat and they were on their way to collect their teenage daughter from netball practice, before heading up the highway to a country town on the way to Adelaide. This suited Beau down to the ground, they weren't concerned with his age and invited him into the front seat with them as the daughter would have all her clothing gear and a ball to go in the backseat.

Beau squeezed in beside the mum on the bench seat of their sedan and before they had traveled a block, mum had squeezed her ample bosom into his face and then settled her hand between his legs. Beau was learning that middle-aged women can be a little frisky, and with her husband right beside her, she must have guessed that Beau was too scared to say boo. For 15 minutes they drove with mum's hand between his legs and her bosom booming into him. Of course, Beau had only fears and phobias and a little

amazement. He had never imagined a strange woman being overtly sexual and had no idea how to react.

In due course they arrived at the sporting complex to pick up the daughter. Being a perfect gentleman, Beau bailed from the front seat to open the door for daughter who slid straight in as though she was used to having a chauffeur all the time. She then grabbed his arm and almost hauled him in after her. Beau sat on the backseat beside teenage daughter. The ride was crazy, he was sure 'daughter' was playing with his leg, but then decided it must be because the mum had woken something in him that he never knew existed. As late afternoon turned into evening, the group continued up the highway. It was dark in the back seat as the fingers started probing. A hand collected his hand and pressed it onto her breast. Beau was too young to be excited, just shocked. He didn't resist, it was pleasant and exciting. Within a minute she had guided his fingers inside her and Beau had his first touch of a woman. Once it was established that he could touch anywhere, he explored.

Within another minute he received his first experience of fellatio. Although not at all mature, his body still responded as best it could. Small, tight, rigid and not having any real idea what was going on, he groped around enjoying the experience as best as his

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body and confused and guilt ridden mind would allow him to. They arrived, and dropped him off at a bus stop before heading into the side streets to go home. No-one knew any names, Beau had no clue who they were, but there were two very out of control women in the car as Papa drove them home.

### **Lesson Learned: Women expect more sex than I can give.**

Apart from wandering in a daze, and realizing that the world was entirely different from the picture he had when he left his home, it was time to find out where he was going. Beau had never had the opportunity to travel beyond his outer-suburban home and the hospital in the middle of Melbourne's Business District.

The next few days were spent gradually moving across Victoria. He found that most Pubs would give him a sweeping or dish washing job for a free lunch, some even gave him a few shillings. One night he stayed in a hotel room for free, but had to mop the whole tiled floor of the hotel before the key was his. He awoke in the dark night, in a wardrobe, sobbing silently. Beau was learning the way of the world.

He wandered through the Victorian Country town of Terang, short pants, school shirt and schoolbag in hand. On the outskirts of the

three streets that made up the tiny bedroom community, there were small farms. The very first farm he scoped out had a small barn 1/4 full of hay and with a small tractor. He called out – no answer, he went inside and sat on the hay bales to catch his breath before spotting a large feed box – oats he reckoned. He lifted the heavy lid, climbed inside, lowering the lid silently and fell sound asleep.

Beau awoke, starving hungry, to the sound of little kids. The high pitched squeals that four and five year-olds are so good at. He jumped, banging his head on the lid of the feed box as they popped their heads into the barn for the second or third time – *'Are you baby Jesus, Mister?'* They teased. It was the first time that someone had automatically called him Mister, he felt pride, even though he was still wearing school clothes.

The kids ran off, and came back in what seemed like seconds, they had fruit cake and chocolate and milk for him. It was Christmas Morning and Beau had slept in a manger in the barn overnight! No wonder they asked him if he was Jesus! He gorged himself before emerging into the blaring Summer morning light. He went up to the farmhouse and practiced some lies on them. He told them his father's car had broken down in the next town and he had to wait for spare parts to arrive, so had decided to

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hitchhike out to see him for Christmas. After lunch Beau was offered a trip to the next town, but declined, staying for the afternoon to help them around the kitchen and tidy up after the littlies Christmas mess. Beau was able to tidy himself up before hitting the road again in mid afternoon. The family had packed a small Christmas feast for him and all waved him goodbye.

That night Beau slept under a railway bridge. It had been a hot day and the heat lightning was putting on a magical display as he thought of Santa's sleigh, laughing out loud at the thought of him dodging the flashes trying to get back to the North Pole.

The bridge ran over a little stream and apart from the mosquitoes which weren't too bad, it was an idyllic spot. He had no problem getting off to sleep, although he vowed to steal a handful of toilet paper from the next pub he stopped at. He was working it out.

Sometime in the dead of night, Beau heard the thunder and then a moment later, a bomb hit. Terrifying roar, boom and screeching sounds scared him totally rigid. Flashing lights making crazy shadows along the creek bed – and then the rhythmic clack-clack as the train went overhead. He had learned that railway bridges aren't always the best place to sleep.

He was up, he had no idea what time of dark night it was, but he was far too wired to sleep. He lay awake and watched the dawn, dreaming of a future on the road, perfecting the art of being free. He wondered at the time whether he would remember that dawn. It changed his life.

Breakfast of blackberries tore him up a bit, but gave him a energy to get on the road and provided snacks on the way. If someone could invent a blackberry without a thorn, life would be just about perfect.

Back on the road, hitchhiking, wandering and fearful of getting hungry – he started to watch what birds ate and decided he could eat anything they could. New fruits that he made up names for existed on trees he had never seen before. Most were too bitter to eat, a few were sweet but crawling with grubs – it was tough sorting the good ones from the yucky ones but he slowly learned.

### **Lesson Learned: Free food isn't always good food.**

Hot and weary, Beau wandered into a country Pub for a Lemon Squash – they were always hand made and 1/2 the price of a Coke! It was 4 o'clock and the farmers were drifting in for a beer or ten. He was jibed by the farmers as young and scrawny and in the hotel with all the big boys. One of them mocked him by

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asking if he was chasing work. As a form of automatic defense mechanism, Beau declared his readiness to take on any task. He was offered a job if he could beat 'Ces' at an arm-wrestle. Ces looked like he had been pushed out of his tree by his mother. Ugly as sin, filthy muscles bulging between pornographic tattoos and 3 days growth on his toothless face, Ces was the sort of guy that people walked out of their way to avoid confronting.

Too scared to say no, Beau sat opposite the hulking brute and thrust his arm out in a show of determination. Ces, just ruffled Beau's shock of red hair and said, "He'll do!" Beau had passed his first job interview with an ape.

**Lesson Learned: In the absence of sanity, bravado has a place.**

Beau spun a similar yarn about his father being a few hours away, stranded, and that he was supposed to meet him here in town when he got the car fixed. He was told to meet the farmer outside the Pub at 6 am and they would give him some work.

Beau slept in an old truck that was missing its wheels and sitting in a lean-to shed at the back of the pub. Bird calls signified dawn and he was up and ready for work in 30 seconds. A beat up Ford

Zephyr ute pulled up at the pub with another 2 workers already in the back. They all had various provisions with them and laughed at his schoolboy shorts. The job for the day was hay-carting. This involved tossing bales of hay from the field on to the back of a large flat-top truck.

Ces collected another couple of workers at a road junction just out of town and proceeded another few miles before heading down a long rough driveway to the waiting flat-top. Everyone and everything was transferred across and the truck drove through a couple of small fields and a series of gates until they arrived at their first field for the day.

Each of the bales weighed just a little more than Beau did and was held together with two spaced strands of long fiber jute rope. Lifting those from ground level and heaving them to his own shoulder height required him to get his knee under each bale and use a knee jerk to get the extra lift. He ignored his shoulder surgery and just plowed on as best he could. The day got hotter and after a few hours, everyone stopped, sat in the shade of the truck and boiled a billie of sweet, soupie black tea on a small campfire.

Beau was given a turn on the tray of the truck, where the task was

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to take the weight from the worker on the ground and heave them up the growing pyramid of interlocked bales. The art was in the placement, but the work was still hard grunt lifting the bales.

Each of the workers was rotated through each of the tasks, including driving the truck at a steady 2 miles an hour, creating an assembly line effect. Of course Beau was short and had never driven any vehicle, but they spent 30 seconds giving him instructions and away they went. It was while he was driving that he was able to see his own arms and legs. They were red raw from the scratching hay and his fingers felt as though they'd been cut in two by the bale ropes sawing away into his baby soft hands.

Beau was able to put all his farm laborer's swear words to good use. He scored a nickname of Casper, which he clung to for years. It referred, of course, to his near transparent skin – although he was dotted with freckles between his hay-cuts. Someone explained that Beau only needed another 24 freckles and he would be brown all over. He laughed with the words and secretly wondered if it was true.

Beau associated his youth, pasty complexion, freckles and red hair as being synonymous with being 'out of place' and spent a

lifetime over compensating for that.

**Lesson Learned: Redheads are weak and puny and have to prove their endurance.**

They all took a break to swim in the dam on the corner of the property. The dam was only 15 or 20 feet wide and was a clay construction. A bulldozer had taken a gouge out of the earth and left the mound of clay on the down hill slope, creating a dam wall. This also allowed cattle to walk in on the shallow end easily. Streaked with yellow clay and rich red mud, they jumped back on the truck, dripping wet and continued the day's work. By keeping their clothes and mud on, they stayed wetter and cooler longer and had less problems with bugs.

**Lesson Learned: Dirt is the friend of the worker.**

At the end of the day, everyone returned to the pub and Ces, the boss cocky, bought a round of beers for the workers. Beau scored a lemon squash and 2 ten pound notes. His mouth gaped as he received his first real pay packet, more in one day than his father had ever brought home after his two weeks working on the road. As Beau started to stuff the money in his pocket, one of the workers reminded him to keep his cash out of sight, and Beau

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vowed to find a way to keep his money from leeches and thieves that hung around in some of the pubs.

Ces asked where he was staying and when Beau stammered, Ces remarked that there was a woman that ran a boarding house down the road. He took him down to meet her, and gave Beau a glowing reference as the hardest worker in the team. Beau beamed. Mrs. Findlay showed him to a very old but clean bedroom, showed him where the bathroom was down the hall and suggested in her very matronly manner, that he have a shower before dinner.

When he saw himself in the bathroom mirror, he was shocked – beetroot red sunburn on the outside of his arms, red raw skin on the inside and hands so swollen that they looked like boxing gloves. His face was puffy and almost iridescent. The tops of his legs looked like mincemeat – he was a mess. The shower hurt, but eventually took some of the fire away. It was then that he noticed that his wounds were like thousands of tiny paper cuts, all about pain, but no real damage.

Back in his room from the shower, Mrs. Findlay had left 3 pairs of boy's rough jeans on his bed and a jar of ointment for his scarred skin. Beau slathered the goo over his arms, sat in a strange rocking lounge chair, examined the cupboards and

furniture and found himself absently staring at the unusually painted ceiling; then nodded off.

Each of the four walls was painted an entirely different bright color. That wasn't all that unusual in rural communities, but the ceiling consisted of four painted triangles, emanating from its closest wall. The effect was like a circus tent, quite bizarre. The kaleidoscope was Beau's first realization that interior decorating was not a natural talent for everyone.

**Lesson Learned: Have access to all choices, but choose only one.**

He fell asleep before dinner, during dinner and immediately after dinner. He was almost crying with pain, laughing at the money that was now stuffed into his shoe and fearful of the next day's work. The fear was more about whether he would be able to maintain his bravado as his body was sagging so quickly under the strain.

He didn't remember the dream, but woke long before dawn, crying, inside the cupboard in Mrs. Findlay's Guest House.

But by sunrise, Beau was better prepared. He was in the jeans that

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were left out for him, had scored a spare hat from one of the other workers and had on a long sleeve shirt. The team continued on in the same field for the morning and then moved on to another field in the afternoon. A real lunch was brought out to the truck that day and they all feasted on roast lamb and slabs of bread to soak up the axle grease looking gravy. The tea was bitter. Black, thick and sugarless today. It left a slake of tannin in his mouth that refused to budge for the day. His teeth felt furry, and the exhaustion kept creeping up on him, but he refused to let it beat him. If the others could do it, so could he. He'd show 'em!

Beau got a lot of smart talk from the other workers in that first week, but he grew to realize it was his initiation to the Worker's World and stopped being embarrassed when they told dirty jokes or teased him about his immature body. He was starting to give back a bit of cheek when he found himself flat on his back and a blackness covering his mind.

**Lesson Learned: Give and take are not equal when coming from a twelve year old.**

Boss cocky jumped in grabbing the assailant and was screaming as though he was going to fire the guy, until Beau stood up for his opponent and admitted he had been asking for it, and had just been given a tap to wake him up. That's when Beau was accepted

by the crew. They knew he could roll with the punches, figuratively and literally, so was not seen as a threat.

After four or five days, Beau was 'passed on' to a sheep farmer. Farm workers in those towns were like a rough team that were referred from farm to farm, a few dropping by the wayside, a few being added along the way.

Beau scored the unenviable task of dagging sheep. This simply involved clipping a bulls-eye around the sheep's butts so that their droppings wouldn't tangle with the wool, and attract 'fly-strike', where the sheep is attacked by flies which lay maggots in the manure still attached to the sheep. Infection could start and the sheep could eventually die from the invasion. Some of the sheep he saw had already been struck, and he had to pass them on to more experienced workers, so Beau figured he was just a sheep-shit-shearer. Work was unrelenting, the sun was draining and the boss cocky had no time for sky-larking, but they were a good crew. The lanolin from the fleeces was doing more good for his skin than any other ointment.

Apart from making his 20 pounds a day, the shearers were given a sheep a day to split as food – so after some initial squeamishness, Beau learned to slit and bleed a sheep, hang it, flush it and carve some usable chunks to toss on the campfire. There was often

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lamb to take back to the boarding houses that he stayed at.

That was supplemented with ‘roo shoots. As Beau became more trusted, he was included in evening ‘roo shoots, usually as a worker’s pastime but sometimes as a farm chore. Kangaroos wreak a great deal of havoc on farmers properties and can grow into plague proportions quickly. Everyone seems to have a .2020 or monstrosly heavy .3030 hunting rifle.

Beau considered himself a dead eye shot with a steady hand, but the rifles were simply too heavy for him to lug around everywhere. Still, spot-lighting in the back of a Land Rover or some old paddock car was ideal for him, as the car took the weight. At various times Beau shot kangaroo, rabbit, wild boar, wild goats as well as having to put farm animals down from time to time and taking out the odd snake. He never developed a blood lust, but he did need to be accepted by the crew, and bringing back a fresh kill to the boarding house or hotel was always appreciated.

### **Lesson Learned: Bring food, make friends.**

Beau and another two workers camped out one night after spotlighting, so they could get an early start the following day. After returning from the previous evening’s shoot with a couple of rabbits, they sat around the campfire as they drank and Beau

nodded off. They all stayed close to the campfire to keep the bugs at bay, even though it was hot. They all slept in their clothes on blankets under the stars. A couple of times Beau heard the others getting drunker and louder, but sleep owned him.

Beau awoke to the loudest noise he had ever heard and clutched his head in pain – Mike had used his shoulder as a rest and fired his shotgun at an early morning rabbit. With the barrel on Beau’s shoulder the explosion was inches from his ear. To this day, the ringing in his ear hasn’t stopped. Beau never worked with Mike again.

By the time Beau was 12 he had learned to drive or operate just about everything that could be found on a farm. Combine Harvesters, Tractors, Cars, Trucks and a lot of hybrid machines that would never make it to the made roads. He even drove a water tanker to replenish stock tanks – that was an experience. Wallowing over rocky tracks was hard enough, but pulling up beside a dam offered a new experience. One second after pulling up, the tanker lurched forward a yard as the weight of sloshing water hit the unbaffled end of the tank, immediately, it threw the vehicle back again and gradually rocked itself to stable again. The boss cocky was with Beau on the first run, and he didn’t say a word – then laughed his head off as the boy sat open mouthed

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while the truck danced on. These days, vertical baffles inside the tanks dampen the effect, but in those days it was a free-for-all.

Beau gradually worked his way North over the Summer. Many of the places he worked were only known by the local farmer's name, creek or bridge, until he visited the Riverina District.

Citrus fruits and grapes went on for miles. They needed workers and there had been special trains put on to bring (mainly migrant) workers from Melbourne to Mildura.

The weather got hotter and drier, the fruit was in high demand and no-one bothered that he was just a kid. There were tent cities to house the workers. Fruit picking is hard work. Everyone is paid by the basket, not by the hour, so they have to stay in good with the tally-man. But after hours, this was a new world. There were gambling tents, opium dens, brothels and sly grog tents. They raffled a girl every night and fist fights were as common as knife fights. This was like the gold rush days, Beau thought. Here the boss cocky walked around with a rifle and a pistol, ready for whatever might happen. Police would roll up each night and drag a few more away. This was not at all like the small farms in the South where everyone knew everyone.

It was exciting, frightening and above all, intriguing. Beau made it his business to visit every tent or group that he could over the 3 weeks he was there. He never found the end of the rows of tents. He smiled secretly at the knowledge that few boys in his old school would have seen inside a brothel on a fruit farm on their twelfth birthday..

He learned that nothing cleans your hands (or anything else), like orange juice, providing he had some water to rinse it off with before the bugs zoned in on him or it scorched his clothing. So the cuts he had from the hay carting were now clean, but they stung like fury as the juice inevitably found it's way across every pore.

Theft was high at the camp and Beau was sure he was only left alone because of his age. If they knew he had 500 pounds in his shoes, he knew his feet would have been carved off. As he poked his head into various tents looking for the fictional 'Charlie' he learned a lot about the way people live. He also got to sample foods from all over the world, and got clipped over the ear a bunch of times.

**Lesson Learned: A washing line tells a lot about the people inside.**

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Beau was too short to be very good at fruit picking other than grapes, he always had to get others to clean up after he had exhausted his reach, but he certainly did fine in the packing sheds. This was also his first time on a forklift and he had a ball. Of course most of the time was spent fetching wooden crates for the grapes, oranges, lemons, grapefruit etc... that were being lumbered into the shed via a tractor train. There was time for exploration in the rows of crates, fumbling moments with some of the migrant camp girls that gradually filled Beau's poor understanding of relationships.

**Lesson Learned: Quick gropes without names beats the language barrier.**

Most of the workers followed the sun and continued to pick crops along the Murray and Goulburn river systems. By now Beau had acquired a road map of Victoria & the Riverina District that was given out to the migrant pickers, and was certainly getting to know his way around the Western half of the state.

He moved deeper into New South Wales, working all manner of crops and livestock, digging post holes, mending fences, building farm sheds with few days off. The main problem he experienced was the sun. Living under an Aussie slouch hat and (sometimes)

wearing sunglasses didn't stop sunburn poisoning from sending him into delirium at regular intervals. By the time Beau had reached the tiny hamlet of Maude in the Hay Plains, the scars from his shoulder operation had swollen and turned to fierce looking rope that seemed to grow new painful knots every day. Time to have it checked and that meant a trip back to Melbourne.

Two days later, after having slept overnight in a St Vincent De Paul clothing bin (and scored some clean clothes) a twelve year-old scruffy, sunburned, redheaded boy shuffled back into Peter McCallum Clinic in a state of collapse. The wound was metastasizing quickly and they admitted Beau for immediate treatment based on his prior history. A series of injections were required around the wound site before the chemotherapy began. The pain of the 220 steroid injections was intense and was a challenge that Beau accepted as penance for the damage he had done to his family.

Penance was a huge part of the family/religious guilt structure that was not only endemic in the era, but a specialty of Beau's family values. It was important to maintain discipline and order. In the 1960s when the adult males in society had almost all been involved in a World War, every aspect of society was based on the values of martial law. Harsh, stern, severe, respect and discipline

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were words of the 1950s and 1960s. Little was recorded, favors and pay-backs were common.

The farmers he had been working with were tough and although usually very fair, they were definitely rule based. Deviations beyond their norm were not tolerated, new concepts, machinery or ideas were stomped on quickly.

In such an environment, Beau was astounded by the humanity and care of the nurses that held him as he vomited, shat, pissed, cried and whimpered during the chemotherapy treatments. There was nothing they could have done with more humanity. In all his twelve years, Beau had never been held, supported and caressed as much as he was during this time. That didn't stop the loneliness, the emptiness and the feeling of deep sorrow that seemed to be packed in his kit bag, traveling with him daily.

Three weeks later and after 24 hours without vomiting, Beau was allowed to progress to the next stage of treatment. Radiation Therapy was still in its infancy in Australia, but the equipment was definitely space age. Beau was wheeled into a room that was a 20ft cube. What he had imagined as a Buck Rogers ray gun, was actually a 15ft tall inverted cone shaped barrel that hung from the ceiling, aimed directly at his shoulder. The nursing staff packed lead shielded aprons all around his body, reminding him

that any movement would be fatal as the radiation was being aimed a mere inch from his brain.

Fear froze Beau solid. He knew that the medical staff were the only believable people he had ever really known and this was a fight for life. In those early days of Radiation Treatment the dosage was much higher than today and the duration was commonly three to five hours. Not a single nerve twitched the whole time he was in there.

Three consecutive days treatment were required before they could operate, as they knew that most cancers in those days spread rapidly as a result of the cell disturbance during the operation.

After three treatments and before the waves of nausea overtook him, he was wheeled off to surgery. The four inch scar turned into an eight inch scar. The nausea returned.

A week after surgery, Beau was taken back into Radiation Therapy for one more treatment and then returned to the ward for his Chemotherapy treatments. Nothing could stop the nausea, food was an enemy. Try as he could to comply with nursing requests, Beau simply could not stomach the thought of food, let alone digest it. He gagged on water and rarely had the strength to

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swallow anyway.

Four months went by before Beau was able to leave the hospital and he had to have weekly, then monthly checkups. His weight loss was dramatic, from skinny down to emaciated. Deep dark rings surrounded sunken eyes. His very ordinary teeth simply fell out of his mouth leaving craters that wouldn't heal. His hair, of course had disappeared and even as it reappeared it would give up and fall back out. Fingernails and toenails dropped like Autumn leaves and Beau's skin dried and scaled, continually flaking. Open sores refused to heal and generally Beau failed to thrive.

Evelyn was a nurse in the Chemo ward. She realized that Beau had never had a visitor and would bring in medical books that she would leave on the bedside table. When he was to be discharged, she arranged to put him up at her place while he was attending Outpatients, as she had a house in Carlton that was very close to the hospital in the North Western area of the Melbourne Business District. Leaving hospital wasn't a sign of health, just an admission by the medical system that there was nothing more they could do.

Evelyn's husband Gino, worked at the Baillieu Library, the main medical library at Melbourne University. He brought home books from the library and sample books from distribution agents for his

own work, to review, to read and, quite accidentally, to leave for Beau to read. Beau acquired a taste for reading medical books and spent the next six months recuperating slowly, while gorging himself on the information that was being made freely available to him. He often woke up in the wardrobe in his room, torn between a safe spot in the dark and his desire to read.

Gino provided the Medical Dictionaries that were required to decipher the medical books. Beau also had access to their set of the Encyclopedia Britannica and found that to be essential reading to draw the variety of disparate knowledge together in some order.

It was during this time with Gino and Evelyn that Beau started writing. It started with reference notes between the books he was reading, and gradually on to short tales of his environment before he moved to the required poetry of youth. It was the unearthing of those early notes, held for years in trust by Evelyn and Gino, that were the basis for these chapters. Those notes now remain a treasured manuscript, and a reminder of the times, in the words of the times.

**Lesson Learned: Memory changes history just as history changes memory.**

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With chemo and radiation behind him, Beau hit the road again. He found his oldest brother living in a tiny flat in Melbourne's Eastern suburbs, sharing with a motorcycle traveling companion, Dave.

Beau wanted to move in with brother Dennis when Dave moved on, but apart from a single night crash, that wasn't to be. Beau claimed he was living at his parents' home to allay suspicions, but hung around the area, breaking into cars and sleeping in them most of the time. There were also large clothing bins for the Salvos or St Vincent de Paul Society at many of the Service Stations that were easy enough to crawl into and sleep. The clothing in there made for an often cleaner option and also for ideal bedding, even though the bins were too small to stretch out properly.

Beau's savings had all been passed on to Evelyn & Gino, so money and food was still a problem, he needed to get a job, but he knew the Winter months would be hard to score farm work and he could get spotted in the city too easily.

Moving at night and staying indoors during the day, gave Beau the best cover. His food was often the bread from the back of a

bakers cart, the milk from a front door step. There were times he watched for people to leave their home, waiting for a chance to steal fruit from their trees, but in Winter, the simple choices came down to criminality or starvation.

Moving quietly was natural for Beau. Staying out of the way of police or anyone that might report him, was now standard operating procedure. Years later, when his own children were afraid of the dark, Beau showed them that they had cover in darkness and could see people more easily at night than in the day. There was more safety in darkness than in the light.

It wasn't long before Beau was using his talents to break into people's homes and eat his fill. He didn't need to steal anything else, more because he wanted to travel light, or not have any incriminating evidence on him, than his high morals. He had no desire to be a 'thief', he just knew that his survival was always optional, and the worst thing that could happen to him would be a jail term.

That appealed to him as totally ironic, because that might also be the best thing that could happen to him, providing they didn't send him home.

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For now, Beau vowed to stay out of the clutches of the law, at least until he was too old to be returned to his parents, then it would become a realistic option.

But for now, he had to be silent and careful. He would take mental snapshots of everything he saw on the approach to a property, pull his long sleeves over his hands to cover for fingerprints, walk on the edges of his shoes to not leave discernible impressions and knock on doors before attempting to enter. Once convinced that the house was empty, he would enter, only touching things that he could return to their place and take small quantities of food that would rarely be missed.

Entry was often gained from a side door or a window that was sheltered from the street and the neighbors. After entry, the door or window was closed and an escape route worked out, then he could head for the kitchen, open the brown paper bag that he always had folded in his back pocket and fill it with enough food for one or two meals. With his stolen food items in the brown paper bag he would then stop still, examine everywhere that he had been for give away signs before carefully leaving the premises, retracing all his steps for evidence, before chowing down a block or more away.

He had already realized that fairly dark, nondescript clothing was wisest, although that did leave his bright red hair as the only glowing impression that he might make on his exit. If he was seen by anyone, he would sing, whistle, throw a stone... anything other than run. If he was approached, "*I'm not allowed to talk to strangers!*" was his standard response as he hurried away.

**Lesson learned: Looking like a cheeky kid was safer than looking like a threatening teenage thief.**

The object was to be a sneak thief. The homeowners were never supposed to know he had been there, never supposed to notice anything out of place. Their food supplies had not been ravaged, just a few slices of meat, a few slices of cheese and no crumbs to show where he had been. He always washed any knife he used to cut with and returned it to the drawer.

This left less evidence, and it was not uncommon to see people walking down the street, eating from the contents of a brown paper bag.

By not stealing anything that wasn't to be consumed immediately, almost all evidence was devoured with the meal. Beau was sure he was not being discovered, but would sometimes return when the occupiers were home and listen at doors and windows to find

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out if they knew of their mystery visitor.

The risk was its own excitement. In lonely days and lonelier nights, Beau might spend a week or more without speaking a single word to another person. This was also a way to see how ‘real’ people lived, how families got along when violence wasn’t the only currency.

Staying clean was a problem, there were just too few places on the streets to be able to clean up, and change clothes. Sometimes Beau took the risk and would wash up at someone’s house. He would go to their laundry, and find a dirty towel to dry himself with, and to clean up any drops in their bathroom before returning it to the laundry.

During his wanders, Beau might see an obvious chore that needed doing around the house. Usually a safety problem in the garden, or shelves that needed to be painted – simple things, usually ones that might have been a give-away during his escapades. He decided to cash in on these problems, by returning to the house when people were home and offering to do odd jobs. People seemed to welcome his enterprising nature and he gradually built up a small nest egg again. Oddly, Beau was always able to offer the exact service that was required by that household as his

specialty.

**Lesson learned: Silent observation give one an advantage.**

More lies. *“It’s going to be a week before my transfer comes through at my new school, and my mum doesn’t want me hanging around the house all day”*.

People believed what they wanted to, Beau moved from clothing bins to his own room. That allowed him to start to gather some new clothing, a few basic tools and his small business was launched. His shower was shared and pokey, his kitchen was a toaster, but he had a door and a window and no names were exchanged. Thirty shillings a week (\$3) was cheap, even in those days, and Beau had a light bulb, hot water and a power plug included. There was no wardrobe, but Beau still found himself waking up under the bed, sobbing, day after day.

The door opened outward, because it couldn’t open inwards. The room was far too small for an inward swinging door. The single bed was 6’ 3” long and the room was 6’8” long. The bed was 3’ wide and the room was 4’ 8” wide. He had measured the room a dozen times to figure out if something else could fit into the room, it invariably couldn’t. The window was a rough 6” hole that had

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been smashed in the wall with a piece of glass taped over it. The view was limited to the entangled weeds and straggly shrub that were jammed between his window and the old timber fence 3' away. At least he could tell if it was light or dark, so he felt as though he had outgrown *The Place* forever.

Ventilation was by means of the door, it was open or closed, dependent on the weather.

Cleaning out garages, mowing lawns, washing cars, digging drains & gardens, felling trees or more often just removing nasty branches, and cleaning out grease traps that always made him gag, all led to their own opportunities. He would do a deal with a Fuel Merchant and sell a tree that he had toppled or get some rocks delivered in exchange and be paid for those by the home owner. He would get extra plants from a nursery and even sell them back the homeowners pots after planting the seedlings and shrubs. Almost every job had a waste component, and Beau was finding ways to make more money from the waste than the original job.

*"Where there's muck, there's money"* rang from a distant past. Beau was still selling beer bottles to the Bottle-O, rags to the Rag Man and cleaning gutters when he turned fifteen. Whenever he

was hired by one of his 'food victims', Beau always paid them back by giving them extra work, bringing lunch to share, or delivering an extra plant.

There were bush-fires that hit such places as the township of The Basin in the Dandenong Ranges. Beau wasn't yet a member of the SES but like everyone in the area, responded to the call (The State Emergency Service is a primarily voluntary based government organization that was somewhat akin to the National Guard in the US, but only trained against Natural Disasters so no weapons training at all.)

Beau answered the call to join his group outside Ferntree Gully, but on his way to the outer suburban town in the foot hills, he stopped to collect his lifelong friend Glenn and together they went to the local Red Cross Center and collected hundreds of garments including jeans, shirts and underwear as well as large quantities of bandages. Having been caught in bush-fire relief centers before, Beau knew the value of a shower and clean clothes.

The drive to Ferntree Gully was longer than usual, the temperature was 114 degrees, the wind was gusting at 60 mph. The SES team met up and was taken by truck to the outskirts of

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Tremont to comb the area for potential evacuees. Many wanted to stay and many had left as the fires loomed over the tiny tourist community only 10 miles away.

*“Who can drive a truck to ‘One Tree Hill’?”*

As evening fell the size of the flames coming from the direction of the nearby town of The Basin was awe inspiring. Flames licking a hundred feet in the air, fireballs racing across the sky as the flammable oils from the eucalypts vaporized and exploded high above the treetops.

A 180 degree view of sky that looked like the end of the world, swirling glowing embers that started spot fires in those horrific conditions; burned eyes from the smoke and embers, bloody and swollen, exposed skin looking blackened as a coal-miner created a war zone. Bandages, bleeding eyes, limping animals and the same look of shock and horror on everyone’s filthy face created a brotherhood of battered souls.

The winds picked up and each local homeowners decision to stay and ride out the onslaught became one of life or death. The order came through the ranks that everyone was to be forced out, physically if necessary and crying, shocked, shaking people were

bundled onto trucks to be taken out of town as the fury of nature barreled down on the township. The first truck got through the firestorm before all roads became impassable.

Beau shot up his hand, having driven trucks and graders since he had hit the road and now his skills were required.

The petrol tanker was filled with water and lined on the outside with firefighters, totally exposed to the elements. The road to Tobruk Avenue and onto Acacia Track was unmade, steep with precipitous cliffs, dotted with fallen, burning trees and barely ten feet visibility in the smoke. Acacia Avenue was a goat track, only suitable as a 4 WD hill climbing event on a good day.

Edging slowly up the frightening gradient some of the firefighters jumped off the truck and walked the path ahead looking out for boulders, trenches or tree stumps hidden in the dense firestorm.

At the edge of the cliff-top, Beau braked sharply and the truck shook and the lurched forward 6ft to the edge of the precipice and just as violently, lurched back and then forward in a pendulum motion as the wash of the water in the unbaffled tanks sloshed its cargo of metal and men. Although Beau had previous experience of this possibility, everyone jumped clear of the truck, fearing it was going to plunge into the township below it.

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As Beau alighted, smiling, from the truck cabin, a burning tree came down beside him and a limb caught him and pinned him to the ground. Stunned but conscious, Beau tried desperately to wriggle and twist his way free, but in the exhausting heat and smoke, he wasn't able to summon the strength. Within seconds, Glenn had found him, and without thinking of his own safety, picked up one end of the burning limb and angled it away from Beau, before the weight and pain overcame him.

Glenn's forearms and hands were badly burned, Beau had little more than scorched stripes on his back and a bunch of bruises to slow him down. It was three months before Glenn was able to make a fist, and as a trained boxer, that meant no fights and no money.

### **Lesson learned: Everyone needs one good friend.**

With his fifteenth birthday behind him, Beau was able to get a real job. After sprucing up into some newish clothes from the Op Shop, Beau scored a job at the now defunct Brunton's Flour Mill in North Melbourne. He was an office junior, sometimes working in the administration, sometimes at dispatch and more and more in the laboratory where samples were continuously taken and tested for quality control.

Shortly after he started, the company had a Summer Picnic and Beau won the Brunton's Gift – a foot race that was held in such high esteem that Beau scored a trophy and had his name etched on a huge shield that was displayed in the front office. For a kid that had been told not to expect a thirteenth birthday, Beau had beaten the odds.

Bruntons's also distributed other grain and seed, mainly in large heavy hessian bags. Beau went on deliveries enough to see the huge quantity of empty bags that were being stored at the major re-sellers. A few inquiries and Beau was into recycling those bags. He was able to have the dirty old bags collected and taken out to the United Carpet Mills in Bell Street Preston, where they shredded them and used them as jute filling for carpet underlay. He dealt with Mr. Wolf.

One day while Beau was weighing bags as they came off the truck, a woman came into their receiving depot asking for **Mr. Fox**. When corrected and told that she probably needed to speak to Mr. Wolf, she remarked, "*He certainly was one of those animals!*"

Beau loved the look on Mr. Wolf(gang)'s face!

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With a consistent pay packet and cash on the side, Beau was enjoying some of the niceties of life. He began ice-skating at one of the rinks close to the city and found that after a short time, he was a natural. Speed skating, Dancing and even Ice Hockey led him to his first opportunity to perform on stage. A small ice pantomime was arranged and Beau had a number of small parts in that production.

Seeing himself as a performer was never high on Beau's list, but once he started, the lights attracted him like a moth to a flame. Beau joined an amateur theatrical group and over the years to come, was involved in shows such as Tommy, Gondoliers, Mikado, Mame, and a host of other productions. He even scored some chorus roles where he was part of the bulk fill adding volume more than talent.

This led him to casual work backstage at Her Majesty's Theater, in the props and costumes where he was able to work on such seminal productions as Hair, Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar.

Beau had a family knowledge of photography. His father was a photographer and Beau had been a witness to the magic in the darkroom. He hadn't followed up on that knowledge but had confidence in his technical ability to understand the technology of

the time. Beau would follow the lighting gurus at the theater and wondered what it would be like to take photographs in there.

At that time a Publication called The Melbourne Trading Post had just hit the stands. This was full of classified advertisements for all manner of goods. Beau scoured the Trading Post regularly for bargains in his areas of interest. Eventually, Beau found someone that was selling an old camera for seven dollars. Beau bought it, ran some film through it and decided he wanted better. He found a product at one of the camera shops called *CameraLac* that gave a new finish to old cameras and lenses.

After cleaning up the camera Beau put it up for sale in the Trading Post and sold it for seventeen dollars.

Beau continued to Buy, Use, Clean and Resell cameras until he had a range of both 35mm and 6x6cm cameras. He smirked, knowing that his original investment of seven dollars plus two dollars worth of paint had resulted in over five thousand dollars worth of equipment within two years.

While building up his photographic equipment, Beau continued to build up his photographic experience, scoring small jobs through friends and acquaintances. Beau had commenced something that would be with him for the next fifty years.

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Returning to hospital for another series of radiation and another operation, weren't really on Beau's 'To do' list, but it happened anyway. The pain from his shoulder was overwhelming and the loss of use of his left arm stopped all photography, and eventually resulted in so many days off work or late starts that his job at the flour mills was being jeopardized. He paid up his rent in advance and took the trip to Peter McCallum Clinic again.

Beau was out of hospital and back home in nine days. No chemo this time, so no extended illness or rehabilitation time, just an arm in a sling and a few hundred stitches to slow him down. Beau went back to his tiny flat and read all the magazines he could afford about the latest photographic equipment and techniques. At one stage, Beau's father had worked for Peter Fox Studios. There had been some politics and Beau's father had lost his job, but here they were advertising for a Lab Assistant in the Camera Magazine. Beau smiled at the irony and rang them the next day. He apologized for his appearance at the interview and assured them that the sling would be gone in a week or so.

They held the job open for the three weeks that it took to get rid of the sling, and Beau was finally fully immersed in the Photographic World, even though he spent most of his time in the darkroom.

Cleaning was a big part of his job, but over time he gained more experience with developing and printing and learned the right way to achieve full tone prints. Beau created a negative filing system that solved years of problems and he would also go out on School Photography jobs once a week. Beau had the opportunity to work on a range of different cameras and lighting setups in the studio and on location.

Spin-off businesses such as Restaurant Photography were also managed by Peter Fox, and it was here that Beau learned the specialist equipment and procedures that were required in the Film days of restaurant photography. How to develop a roll of film in 2 minutes, dry it in one minute and print it before the restaurant served dessert became an art form.

Beau was making contacts at many of the great Melbourne restaurants, and discovering that there was no photographic equipment specifically designed for the task, perhaps another opportunity.

By seventeen, Beau was competent in the darkroom, able to shoot couples in restaurants and deliver the same hour and still had his hessian bag business on the side. Peter Fox was bought out by Milverson's of Sydney who decided to open a retail store. Swanston Street in Melbourne was Beau's first retail stint.

# WHOSE RULES

## THE NASTIES BIT

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Collar proud, Beau tried to stand straight behind the counter, but was usually to be found tinkering with components or trying to fix cameras in the back room.

Severe pain made it difficult for Beau to concentrate when dealing with the retail customers, and always feeling that he had to be short, sharp and shiny for the front counter was difficult. Beau continued for another 6 months, and then that 4" rope on his shoulder tightened too hard, it was time for another trip to Peter McCallum Clinic.

Beau went back, but they insisted on a Doctor's Referral and because it had been so long since his last visit, Beau went back to scratch and started again. The GP and then the surgeon, Bernard O'Brien agreed it was time for more radical surgery. Measurements, marking pen drawings on his scarred shoulder and two days went by before he was admitted to Royal Melbourne Hospital for surgery to be followed by Outpatient Radiation at Peter McCallum Clinic.

Eight inches stretched to 14 inches, his shoulder immobilized with a type of shoulder splint that forced his arm into a hand on hip position and with plaster to completely fix his arm and even freeze his hand so that there was no use for that arm at all.

Beau wasn't able to work in the bustle of a retail store in the heart of Melbourne, and certainly couldn't work in the darkrooms while he was immobilized, so he stayed at home and wrote the tortured poetry of youth and more of the stories of his hospital visits.

As fortune would have it, the operation needed to be repeated as there were still signs of the malignancy spreading. Of course they didn't operate again until the previous wound was healed, which must have seemed a little pointless, as they took so much more off the next time. This time it was bolstered by Chemo again and Beau was once more an Inpatient at Peter McCallum.

Sir Benjamin Rank was the consulting surgeon, and recognized the potential problems from the positioning of the wound. His answer was to completely immobilize the arm for six months, until the scar tissue was strong enough to take the stretching required in everyday movement. As the melanoma had already spread and was potentially into other tissue and the bone, the wound became much deeper with a section of bone removed as well as the surrounding tissue.

While it's easy for a specialist to tell a teenager to take the next 6 months off, the reality was that Beau had no income, had a small

# WHOSE RULES?

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

"My grandfather was a photographer" says Beau, but being brought up in the harshness of the Australian Bush, and a lifetime of poverty, meant that most of his equipment was hand made, painstakingly over months, and his decision to actually capture an image was hindered by the cost of producing glass plates, rather than his ability to see the beauty of an image.

However, he saw photography as a factual recording instrument, and not as an artist's tool, although conversely, he was a painter, and created some wonderful images in oils. He saw photography as a 'purist' endeavor to accurately record his surroundings, but struggled financially and was never able to have the right equipment.

Beau has some remnants of his darkroom and studio equipment, and they were nearly all items, re-purposed from household use, to make his own version of equipment.

So the real thing that he left Beau was this legacy - a single statement...

*"Don't bother pressing the shutter, until you can't see the image, because of the tears in your eyes."*

Beau's father took over the old studio, added some money and

went into partnership with a couple of well known fashion photographers, [Athol Shmith](#) and [John Cato](#).

As a photographer, Beau's father was a technician - intent like his father on the science, the logic and the accuracy of his technical knowledge.

Frank Nestor came from a time of rigid rules and fear of change, so he was always the one to photograph the workings of a watch, but rarely the one to photograph the people wearing it.

The late Athol Shmith left an image to me, a single 16 x 20 print of [Sir Laurence Olivier](#), one of two in existence, because Athol would only ever print two, and then destroy the negative to maintain the value of the print.

Along came color... Beau's father resisted the change as dramatically as he could - for a long time he refused to believe it was actually happening - and when it was obvious, he put his camera down - never to pick it up again.

Beau vowed to accept change.

Beau had spent boyhood years hanging around his grandfather's darkrooms, and later, still as a child, sometimes making pocket money churning out prints in his darkroom - but cameras were

# WHOSE RULES?

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

things he had been rarely allowed to touch. It was years before Beau got his first 'real' job in a studio that was predominately working with human subjects, and although he was still officially only the darkroom assistant, he was able to setup lighting and go out on the country runs in a huge removalist's van that was part sleeping quarters, part darkroom and part studio; to photograph whole townships of people.

As was the fashion at the time (and because of available film speed and lack of portable lights) most of the portraits were done "In studio" and of course that was the real advantage of the van. They then processed sheet film, then printed in the mobile darkroom, and slept overnight in the van to emerge in the morning to sell the prints to the townspeople before heading off to the next stop. Hot lights and reflectors, huge cast iron and wooden stands, and enough electricity to power the Queen Mary and they were under way. No flash lights, rarely color, and fewer and fewer orders. The hand held 35mm cameras were making their impact.

Peter Fox Studios quietly slid away to be taken over by Milverson's Camera Stores. This at least gave Beau the opportunity to buy into the newly emerging 35mm SLR market at wholesale prices. Counter hopping at Peter Fox, selling film to the people that were putting him out of work didn't really appeal.

But he was asked to join the technical crew at Wagner's Industrial Photographic's by the late, great Ern Wagner.

Learning about the top quality Lab and Studio Equipment allowed him the opportunity of visiting the best photographers and color labs in the country and to be able to work on a variety of trouble shooting techniques to assist them to produce images more efficiently. The knowledge gained was invaluable and eventually gave him the opportunity to do a number of cadet ships. One was at Durst (High Speed Lab Equipment) in Italy, and the other was at Rodenstock ([Large Format Lenses](#)) in Germany. This opened his eyes to the world - his first overseas trips and a whole world that his camera needed to capture. Beau bought Hasselblad cameras and started selling images to magazines. On his return to Australia a year later, Wagner's were in financial difficulties, and he took another offer to move to Mark's Industrial Photographics, a move that saw the end of his Sales career.

Beau maintained the 'day job' while acting in local theater productions at night, and then working on underground films while he attempted to finish a university course. Beau also gained extra work in legitimate film, and did many short appearances in the local TV productions; [Carson's Law](#), Prisoner, A Country Practice, Neighbours etc... He looked at the movie industry, and

# WHOSE RULES?

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

made a number of training films, and a documentary for VicTour. But Beau found out he didn't have the attention span to get a feature film in the can... so back to work!

A client called in and asked for some Lab work to be done (which had never been performed at Mark's) and so he was referred to the nearby LaTrobe Colour Lab. The client returned and said that it would be too long a delay - was there anywhere else - he needed 36 - 8x10 Black and White prints - from slides for the local Hairdressing College. A multi stage process. Beau conferred with his superiors and then agreed to do the job as a 'foreigner'. Back-yarding to assist the client.

The prints were on his desk the following morning at LaTrobe's 5 day pricing, and the client was very pleased. He then handed Beau 30 rolls of film and asked him to process them and to perform similar work at the same price. But he wanted 30 - 8x10 prints of each usable slide. Approximately 32,500 prints!!!! Within ten days all prints were delivered and paid for. Beau had a business. He was then commissioned by the same person to go around Australia taking photographs of all the "Hairdressing Shows".

This meant some almost candid photography in the low light of runways, as well as shots in a mini studio that he set up to capture each style as it was finished. These images were used in books as

training material for apprentices, and some of them were purchased by the large hair-care companies for salon displays. Beau was subsequently hired by many of the hairdressers to produce in-store folios, and display posters. While many of the hairdressing models were friends of the hairdressers, many were also supplied by the legitimate modeling agencies. Some of these shots went into their portfolios, and Beau was then commissioned by the modeling agencies to supply portfolios for their models.

A fill-in job came up for a clothing supplier, Beau was to supply the models by calling on contacts through the agencies. The shots were great - better than he expected, and the client's designs were taken up by Myer. Although the client had paid extra for models - (he originally wanted to use his nieces) he could see the value in the professionalism of the models that were supplied.

At the end of that shoot, the model, a trained ballet dancer, asked Beau to stay back and take extra shots for her portfolio. As Beau had already handed over the commissioned images on roll film to the ad agency, this would mean that Beau would have the opportunity to work with a professional model and dancer and actually keep the negatives.

Apart from some local competitions, Beau won a trip to Cologne, Germany to collect his prize as the Best of Show. The flight was

# WHOSE RULES?

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

filled with advertising executives and Beau got to pass his folio around to the captive audience on board.

Through their advertising agency, Myer Department Stores offered Beau a second camera position with them - the fall back guy in case their normal photographer didn't show.

For two months, the phone didn't ring... and then - their chief photographer was having marriage problems and had become unreliable. Beau scored the job of his life. Six weeks in Europe, two weeks back in Australia - and doing that six times a year.

Twice he scored the "Asia Run" and three times the US run, but mainly following fashion week throughout Europe.

Seventeen million negatives later, Beau was a fairly qualified fashion photographer. Beau had done the odd wedding - one model or another would decide to tie the knot, and had shot many magazines and other fashion layouts as well as countless jewelry, and accessory ads. Beau had the opportunity of working along side film crews and video crews, art directors and directors etc... traveling around the world and meeting a wide variety of people.

Mostly in the High Fashion and Consumer Fashion area, but some Avante Garde and Glamour work as well.

For over 14 years Beau kept up this mad pace, chasing deadlines and traveling. A very exciting world, shots by the Eiffel Tower, a runway show in Madrid, a studio shoot in Rome and back to Melbourne to shoot Nightclubs for the local singles magazine, before racing off to a Rally to take photographs on a hairpin bend or a hairdressing show at "Leonda".

Beau met his partner Marg when she walked in the studio door with a cardboard box full of fashion wear (naughty nickers to be precise!) She needed to have them photographed - for a catalog. Beau organized the models, she organized the wardrobe, and within two weeks she was working with Beau full time.

Four years later they decided to start a family, and realizing the possible dangers of having a partner nine months pregnant, and Beau arriving home two hours late from a Glamour shoot, Beau retired from Fashion Photography and concentrated on Product, Landscapes and Architecture while he also started an IT business.

Both were enormously successful, photographs ending up in National Geographic and others, while the IT business seemed to take on a life of its own, although there was always a background desire for him to complete the Glamour Photographic chapter of his life.

# WHOSE RULES?

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

Beau continued on with the IT business for 15 years, before having the opportunity of selling out to a US based Multi-National. He had filled some time and sunk some profits into property investment and that had been a major part of his financial strategy. Those two investments gave him the finances to decide exactly what he wanted to do, and having split with his partner along the way, and having children now old enough to encourage his work, there was no feeling of restriction.

So this time round, the driving force is the image that he wants to capture, not what the client wants. If they coincide, then he has a client, if they don't - then no client and he takes the shots he wished to anyway. The aim is simply to enjoy the experience, achieve beauty and hopefully give some people a kick start... if they want to listen.

These days, Beau is traveling a fair amount - but traveling with people who want to learn on the journey. Sometimes other photographers, sometimes aspiring models - sometimes both. He found out - there's no fun without sharing.

Oh - and the name "Beau".....???

When he was little - maybe 6 or 7, he read a book, and acted the character out (perhaps for too many years). There were so many kid's at school with the same name - and so when he was playing at home, he apparently said, "Don't call me anything else - *"I'm Beau!"*" and it stuck.

The book - "**Beau Geste**".

Smile if you've read it.....!

Perhaps he has done his apprenticeship, but... perhaps that's all we ever do.... But now he has achieved the twin aims he had been striving for,

*'A moment in time' and 'A point of view'.*

And when it boils down to it... that's all we ever have anyway.

# WHOSE RULES?

THE MIDDLE YEARS



# WHOSE RULES?

## LESSONS LEARNED

- *Never hit someone in the face, they might die.*
- *Redheads have fiery tempers.*
- *Stand tough, it keeps people away.*
- *If you hit someone in the face, they will die.*
- *Nurses can give orders to mothers.*
- *Pain delayed is pain doubled.*
- *A child of the devil needs to be exorcised, regularly.*
- *Dogs can be trusted.*
- *Bleeding fixes things.*
- *Cigarette smoking makes other people tell the truth.*
- *Grow food and never be hungry.*
- *There is always a way to make money when you need to.*
- *Cigarettes are a sign of power.*
- *Punishment is deserved*
- *If you work with food, you get to eat.*
- *The soul can be used to corrupt the mind.*

# WHOSE RULES?

## LESSONS LEARNED

- *Never go back on your word, even if it's a lie.*
- *I know how much harm I have done, I can't undo it. I'm powerless, beaten.*
- *Lying is OK to protect your family, but not okay to protect yourself.*
- *Survival meant silence, failure was terminal.*
- *Stealth and deceit are a good thing.*
- *There is a pecking order that can never be questioned.*
- *Death can be easier than life.*
- *Bottom line, you have to have control over your own life.*
- *Everyone will give you up rather than get hurt.*
- *Everyone is scared.*
- *Sex is dirty, hateful, overpowering, painful, demeaning and shameful.*
- *Once you get away, never look back.*
- *Hypocrisy and religion are synonymous.*
- *Never stay where you aren't wanted, and figure it out before you've wasted eleven years.*
- *There were many more lessons to be learned.*
- *Having a destination makes you seem grown up.*

# WHOSE RULES?

## LESSONS LEARNED

- *Women expect more sex than I can give.*
- *Free food isn't always good food.*
- *Being able to drive makes you employable.*
- *In the absence of sanity, bravado has a place.*
- *Redheads are weak and puny and have to prove their endurance.*
- *Dirt is the friend of the worker.*
- *Have access to all choices, but choose only one - Quickly.*
- *Give and take are not equal when coming from a twelve year old.*
- *Bring food, make friends.*
- *A washing line tells a lot about the people inside.*
- *Quick gropes without names beats the language barrier.*
- *Memory changes history just as history changes memory.*
- *Looking like a cheeky kid was safer than looking like a threatening teenage thief.*
- *Silent observation give one an advantage.*
- *Everyone needs one good friend.*

# WHOSE RULES?

## DEDICATION

BIOGRAPHY

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*"The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met. "*

*— RAW ---*

*The single word that springs to mind as I think of him.*

*Everything was a measure of emotions.*

*Plagued with an unceasing guilt that welcomed both physical and emotional pain, driven by an obsessive need that was only satisfied with more guilt & pain, taking irresponsible risks, that brought people to shun his self destructive nature or ride the roller coaster with him for as long as they could.*

*Larrikin, scoundrel, rascal... describe the boy who fought manhood for as long as Peter Pan.*

*When he asked you to hover at the cliff and fly with him, it was always unclear whether he was speaking in metaphors, or would be happy to test his abilities in reality.*

*Whenever we were actually near a precipice of any sort, he would shy away from it, ever fearful that it would be just too inviting.*

*Everything in his world was a life and death decision, and they were always weighed up, without prejudice.*

*The fact that he squeaked through to this stage of his life is quite an accomplishment for the forces of chance.*

*He hurt some people.*

*He touched parts of their souls that they denied existed.*

*He wanted them to experience even painful emotions, not as a punishment, but as a reward for having opened their minds to the darker reaches within.*

*He loved people.*

*Deeply.*

*But I feel he never felt worthy to stay around them in case he held them back. He needed to share the hidden depths that lay within each of them, before moving on.*

*Never a coward, rarely a hero but always larger than life.*

*No-one who met him, ever forgot him.*

*He saved my life by lifting a burning log off my back while we were fighting bush-fires and again by standing back to back when we were attacked by a gang of knife wielding thugs.*

*For him, everyday events; for me earth shattering, monumental and unforgettable.*

*I know he has saved other lives too.*

*He will live on.*

*He has made countless people think for the first time in their lives.*

*His magnetic personality polarized many people, they were drawn to him, or repelled quickly. He will not be forgotten. From boyhood to manhood he has been an amazing part of my life - I wish I had been with you in the last weeks, old friend."*

*Glenn Derek Highgate - Born September 1949 Melbourne, Australia*

# WHOSE RULES

THE EARLY YEARS

BIOGRAPHY

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# WHOSE RULES

ON THE ROAD

BIOGRAPHY

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# WHOSE RULES

ON THE ROAD

BIOGRAPHY

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*Beau Nestor, 1978, Age 28.*

*Taken near Sandringham Beach, two years after he finished the second of three rounds of chemotherapy at Peter McCallum Clinic.*

*The final round was finished in 1981.*

*The coin around his neck is a Tetradrachm - awarded to him by a Greek couple for saving their lives in an Abbotsford terrace house in 1973.*

# WHOSE RULES

UPDATE 1995

BIOGRAPHY

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## Margin Notes - 1995

I visited my parents' retirement cottage in 1995 to allow my four children to meet their grand-parents. The meeting was solely to give those children the opportunity of putting faces to the names.

During that visit I elicited an apology from my father. Entirely his words. They don't go far enough. Years of hell are supposed to be wiped out in a few sentences.

My mother was too devastated to be able to complete hers, and was fearful of legal ramifications.

On receiving this, photocopies were passed on to all the siblings. The only reaction was from Carmel, "Why did you bother?"

This is the text, written & signed by Francis Joseph Nestor on August 8th, 1995

An Apology for past actions.

8-8-95

I am deeply sorry for all the pain I have caused all my family, and have been trying to make up in some small way. I humbly apologise (Without Prejudice) for- my drunkenness which caused great distress to all my family, for the physical violence inflicted on my children - Dennis, Carmel, Christopher and Brian, for any actions words or example that may have caused them to go against any legal or moral code; For the times I made indecent approaches or actions to my daughter and for any harm or distress I caused her. This is all I can specifically remember now as my recollections are hazy now. The above has been written without prejudice by

FJ Nestor.

8-8-95

AN APOLOGY FOR PAST ACTIONS.

I AM DEEPLY SORRY FOR ALL THE PAIN I HAVE CAUSED ALL MY FAMILY AND I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO MAKE UP IN SOME SMALL WAY

I HUMBLY APOLOGISE (WITHOUT PREJUDICE) FOR - MY DRUNKENNESS WHICH CAUSED GREAT DISTRESS TO ALL MY FAMILY.

FOR THE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE I INFLICTED ON MY CHILDREN - DENNIS CARMEL CHRISTOPHER AND BRIAN FOR ANY ACTIONS, WORDS OR EXAMPLE THAT MAY HAVE CAUSED THEM TO GO AGAINST ANY LEGAL OR MORAL CODE.

FOR THE TIMES I MADE INDECENT APPROACHES OR ACTIONS TO MY DAUGHTER, AND FOR ANY HARM OR DISTRESS I CAUSED HER.

THIS IS ALL I CAN SPECIFICALLY REMEMBER NOW AS MY RECOLLECTIONS ARE HAZY NOW.

THE ABOVE HAS BEEN WRITTEN WITHOUT PREJUDICE

BY  
FJ Nestor

Margin notes update: 12:10 pm 26 Dec 2011

At the age of 62, I have just had a meeting with 2 of my estranged siblings. My brother is eight years older than me, my sister is nearly seven years older. After a few pleasantries the search for commonalities and differences headed straight for our childhood. We have stumbled across each other rarely in the last 50 years. I spent more time with my family yesterday, than I have in all that time.

Our parents are dead. One of the surviving four children attended my father's funeral seven years ago. Two of the children also attended my mother's funeral 3 years ago. My sister attended both funerals, as we would have expected. I attended neither. I simply could not have maintained the decorum required or offered up the platitudes expected, to be of any value to anyone that was grieving on those days.

As our discussion continued into the wee hours of the morning, it became clearer and clearer to me that I represented the 2 younger children, while my brother and sister represented what was an almost generationally different aspect of the family. When I started at Primary School, they had already finished. They were simply too old and too big to regard my closest brother and I as

anything more than annoying babies. There were times that my sister seemed to want to entertain me back then – but now, my suspicions as to why have been fully confirmed. I was simply running interference so that my sister would be less available to my father. I was groomed for that job without knowing it. I'm glad I had some value.

I confronted them (without any judgment) with my feeling that they had abandoned me. They saw their chance to leave, and never looked back. They never visited me – not once. To this day, my sister has once appeared at one of my workplaces to meet me. Neither of them have ever been to any house that I lived in for the last 50 years. Not for a coffee, not for a birthday, not even when I had extensive chemotherapy and radiation treatment for melanoma, spanning 18 years and 43 separate operations. I simply was not on their radar from the day they left home. They agreed that the sibling separation already existed, and that they had simply not thought about it.

I was little better in calling on them, although after being left to stand at the front door on too many occasions, I simply failed to return. We all moved to different states, married, had babies and events were almost always ignored.

I found out about my mother's death six weeks after her funeral and although I would not have attended, I found it more than annoying that no-one had gone the extra mile to inform me. Obviously my mother didn't leave me a note apologizing for her actions – or if she did, it has never surfaced. Knowing my mother's entirely hypocritical concept of religion, I would have expected her to cover a few bases at the pearly gates at the last minute with a full confession. She was adamant that her marriage vows (before God) came before her duty to protect, wash, clothe or educate her children – she simply had no contract with us, we were just accidents of nature while her husband was the one that she owed loyalty to. If any of that makes sense, she was true to her word. She also used us all to run interference in some way. She offered the boys up as sacrificial lambs whenever my father was violent – he would turn on us and take out his hatred and anger, while she slunk away and let it happen.

This started before I was born, with my oldest brother, Laurie (Francis Laurence) now deceased. After an apparently normal birth, my brother developed a medical history at about eighteen months. He was suffering irreversible brain damage to the extent that his vocabulary never flourished, he was severely spastic,

legally blind and totally unable to progress. In those days that meant he was institutionalized and was never spoken about. Naturally, the fear is that he was subjected to the rage that we all experienced and as per the custom of the day, it was all swept under the carpet. He died at 52 in hostel care, after spending 49 years in appalling and sordid squalor in a series of Asylums, all of which have now been closed.

My mother's only known comment about what had happened to my eldest sibling was that my father was extremely upset that the baby was in his bed when he arrived home on leave from the Second World War. As my mother was already known to peddle guilt and blame mercilessly, and no-one had the temerity to confront my father about it, no answer was ever going to be forthcoming. I was eleven before I found out that I had a 21 year old brother.

So many secrets in one family, so many skeletons, so many closets.

### April 2026 Postscript

My name is Brian Patrick Nestor. I was born on the 10th of January, 1950.

I am 76 years of age, living with my wife, Gayle of 18 years in South Carolina, U.S.A.

I haven't seen or heard from my brother Chris (Christopher Michael Nestor (born August 21, 1948) since sending him a copy of dad's apology in 1995. My other siblings have not heard from him either although we believe he was living in Tasmania with his partner Alison (Surname unknown).

I have had occasional contact with my brother Dennis and my sister Carmel. They are also in some contact with each other, but as Dennis lives in Queensland with his wife Cynthia and Carmel lives in Victoria with her husband, Peter, there is no longer any opportunity for them to see each other physically, as they are all in their 80s with various health and cognitive issues.

I have decided to write this postscript as my health is poor and I had let this set of notes wait for too long.

There are many missing pages about life beyond my 20s. Most will never be written. Life was beautiful for the second quarter century, but Loss crept in and crippled me, until Gayle came into my life. We married, traveled extensively chasing Visas and although we wanted to live in Australia, Gayle has an active family in Southern USA and missed them terribly.

We sold up and moved to the US permanently in 2014 after traveling around Australia, around the USA and throughout

Europe and parts of Asia.

Gayle has survived multiple operations, offered a kidney to save a friend's life and spent all these years nurturing me back to mental and physical health.

But a car accident has meant that my heart was severely and permanently damaged and my mobility is forever limited. I cannot travel back to my birth place nor catch up with family ever again.

Gayle has shown me the only loyalty that I have ever known. It hasn't all been roses, but there has never been a second where she has not worked for us.

The hardest working, most honest and loyal friend I could ever imagine and then some.

Thank you Gayle Arlene Younts Hoskins Nestor.

# WHOSE RULES

SAINT SERAPHIM

QUOTE

79

## A Message from Saint Seraphim of Sarov 1754 - 1833

*“Drink from the spring where horses drink—the horse never sips bad water.*

*Rest where the cat finds comfort.*

*Choose fruit that has been touched by a worm.*

*Boldly pick the mushrooms where insects sit.*

*Plant trees where the mole digs.*

*Build your home where the snake basks in the sun.*

*Dig your fountain where birds seek refuge from the heat.*

*Rise and sleep with the birds,*

*and you will gather all the golden grains of the day.*

*Eat more greens, and your legs will grow strong, your heart resilient—*

*like the creatures of the forest.*

*Swim often, and you will feel as free on land as the fish in water.*

*Look at the sky as often as possible and your thoughts will become light and clear.*

*Be quiet a lot, speak little – and silence will come in your heart,*

*and your spirit will be calm and full of peace.”*



*For years I traveled with a “Holy Picture” that had text on the back. It was given to me by Sr. Mary Francesca from St. Mary’s Primary School in Greensborough, Victoria in 1960. My often forgotten reminder, of how to survive simply.*