

Cassie Beattie

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I guess my story really starts a few years ago, when I was 14; I had a mega crush on a guy in my drama class. After class one day he asked if I was going to the drama camp over the summer. I wasn't planning to but if he asked I might ask my parents. I grabbed the booklet after school and went home, my mum was in the kitchen looking a bit tired so I left the brochure on the table and went to help her with dinner. After dinner, when we were cleaning up my mum noticed the brochure, she asked me if I was interested in going, I said I was, that a few people from my drama class were going.

She said she would discuss it with my dad and let me know, I didn't find out until later that my mum could not get time off during the summer holidays and was feeling bad that I would be home alone for the summer. I am the last of 3 children; I was born 11 years after my brother and 15 years after my sister. My sister had married, moved away and had 2 children and my brother was in the military, I may as well have been an only child, my sister left home when I was really little and my brother not long after her. I got to see them during special holidays but we were not close.

The next morning my dad asked me at breakfast if I wanted to go to the drama camp or if I was just going to make my mum feel better. I said I really wanted to go, that it would be fun and I might learn something while I was at it. So dad said I could go, that he would book me in and pay that day. The closing date was the end of the week so he only had a couple of days any way. He made it very clear that after he paid for this I was going like it or not. I was fine with that! Hell 4 weeks with my crush at a camp couldn't be that bad.

The last few weeks of school went really fast between cramming for exams and taking the exams, I didn't really have much time to think about it. I got a confirmation letter about the camp and a list of things I needed to take with me, I put it aside, deciding to concentrate on my exams and think about it on the week of holidays before I left on the camp. So the school term finished and I decide to look at the packing list, there are a few odd things on the list but we had everything I needed at home. I started to gather everything together, making a pile in my room, after work my mum got me a suitcase from the basement and I packed everything into the suitcase making sure I had everything on the list, the next day my mum and I went shopping after she finished work and she bought me some new and some nice things to take away with me. I also bought a new backpack to take with me, I put my new things in the suitcase along with all of the

“just in case” things my mum wanted me to pack. The next morning my mum drove me to the collection point for the camp, there were a couple of people from school but I didn’t see my crush anywhere, I guess he changed his mind. Oh well this was going to be great any way.

I was really excited to be going away for 4 weeks, it was my first real time away from my parents, I know I had been on school camps but never for more than a week. A large coach pulled up, the driver got off and called each of our names, I said good-bye to my mum and told her I Loved her, and that I would write. Then I put my suitcase in the storage locker under the bus and climbed aboard. There were a few other students already on the bus, but no familiar faces. I said hi to a really cute guy towards the back of the bus after he smiled at me. He asked me if I would like to sit with him, I did, why wouldn’t I! He stood up and helped me put my backpack in the overhead lockers. I sat down and waited while everyone else was loaded. There were heaps of empty seats, I thought we must have heaps more stops but we didn’t, it was just us. On the 3 hour bus ride to the camp I learnt a fair bit about all of the people sitting around me, I felt at home, the cute guy asked me if he could talk to me about Jesus, I told him I had already had the chat. It turns out that he went to one of our sister churches and that we knew heaps of the same people. It really helped me to know I was not the only church kid at the camp. I then found out that most of the back of the bus was from the same church! This was going to be an awesome camp.

On the bus along side of me was Troy, he was a walking bible, he knew every verse. Behind him was Ed, his best friend and the class clown, then there was Emma, who was so pretty, and Tess, who was a bit shy but an amazing singer. In our group was also Peter, he was Emma’s boyfriend, and he was also a pastor’s son! We talked, laughed, played Sunday school games and when we got bored we would sing!

When we finally arrived at the camp, we discovered that we were all staying in cabins; there were hundreds of cabins but not many students. We also discovered that some parents had opted to drive to the camp rather than catch the bus.

When most of us were assembled in the dinning hall, a funny little man stood up on a chair and welcomed us, he went through all of the usual house keeping sorts of things, he took us on a tour of the grounds and then when we got back to

the dinning hall, lunch had been served. Lunch was rolls and fruit, some people were complaining about it but I thought it was quite good, compared to school lunches it was great.

After lunch we were all given our welcome packages, it turns out it was one cabin each, there were also timetables, rules and our keys. We also had a name badge and maps! I was a little worried to discover that my first lesson was at 7 am the next morning. My new friend offered to carry my suitcase to my cabin, I was lucky my cabin was fairly close, I had cabin 9, he had cabin 22. Once I got to my cabin, I checked the time table the only other thing we had today was dinner at 6pm, so I had a couple of hours to make my self comfortable.

My cabin had 2 beds, 2 wardrobes, 2 desks and a bathroom, it even had a bath! I was excited and remember thinking, “I think I got a good one!” I took the opportunity to clean everything to give the blankets a good shake outside and I made my bed, I put my things away. I unpacked my books and my torch, I put them by the bed so I would know where they were, I also put my spare bottle of water by the bed. I found a broom in the bathroom so I gave it a quick sweep; I was feeling pretty happy when my new friend swung by to see if I needed anything. It seemed that all of the cabins were the same, we all got a bath, and I guessed from the timetable that there was a fair bit of physical work so I would probably need a hot bath at some stage.

Anyway, I locked my door and my new friend and I went off to have a look around, I really wanted to figure out where everything was so I wouldn’t be late to any of my classes. On our walk we run into my crush, his mum had driven him to the camp because he was late for the bus. He had 4 large bags, what could he possibly need? He also had cabin 47, it was way up the hill. I was going to offer to help but he was a bit snooty so I figured he could lug his own bags. My new friend Troy commented that he was a bit of a princess, something that would become really evident in the next few days.

After dinner, we were all encouraged to get an early night because the first day would be a tough one, We were also reminded that we all needed to be at classes at 7 am sharp, any one that was late would be punished. I went to my cabin, I read my bible for a little while then I checked my door was locked and my curtains closed, before saying my prayers and turning in. It was only early but I was tired and I was not looking forward to my alarm going off at 6.

Next morning my alarm went off at 6, I dragged my feet out of bed, had a quick shower, and pulled on my yoga pants and a t-shirt before heading down to the dining hall for a bowl of cereal. I would have loved coffee but coffee was not allowed! This was going to be a long 4 weeks! After breakfast I went back to my cabin, made my bed, tidied up after myself and went to my first class at around 6.45, I know I was early but Troy and a few others were heading that way so I joined them. They were really nice and I decided they would be the people I spent time with, they were all church people and we were all responsible, so we were in bed early and managed to get to class early. The teacher Mr Norman was impressed, he gave us our workbooks and encouraged us to have a look through it. At 7 we started the class with some stretching and some yoga type moves, it was really relaxing, he moved onto some drama basics, making us do a series of silly things, like be trees!

After about an hour the lesson was over, we were all really surprised the classes were so small, there were about 12 people, I was sure there were about 50 at dinner last night. Mr Norman told us that there were 2 classes of 24, so he had half of his class, not a great start. After our movement class we had an acting workshop, there were still only 12 of us, the workshop went until 10, when we went to the dining hall for morning tea.

We met up with the other group; they only had 10 people show up! So over half were absent, the organizer seemed to relish this for some reason! He did stand up on his chair again and commend us for all making it to the first 2 classes, he also encouraged us to keep it up, reminding us that we only get out what we put in.

My next class was a dance class, so I went back to my cabin to get changed, I was not really looking forward to it, I was not good at dance previously, so I didn't hold out much hope for this class. I did turn on my mobile phone and there was a message from my mum and dad, telling me that they loved me and to have a great time. I grabbed my dance shoes, locked the door and danced over to me class. The teacher Ms Hubbard was really nice, she worked one on one to help me get it together. By the end of the lesson I was hot, sweaty and puffing, so of course the first person I run into is my crush from school, Tony was hot but he looked like he had just woken up! It turns out that he had. I had 20 minutes of free time before lunch, so I went back to the cabin and had a quick shower. I

checked my timetable, I have a couple of classroom type classes, so I figured I could wear neat casual clothes for the whole afternoon, and so I put on my jeans and a t-shirt.
My group all caught up on the way to lunch, we didn't have the same classes but it was nice to have some one to talk to. At lunch the numbers had swelled again, lunch was served, today it was pasta, and after lunch I went back to my cabin for my workbook and took off for my next class. This one was really fun, it was with Mr Norman again, we were discussing some of the plays we had as preparation reading, we even acted out some of the scenes, the classes finished at 4 and I had 2 hours free time. I went back to the cabin, I read some of the plays we had discussed with a whole new appreciation, Troy called past with a vase of flowers, I was suspicious as he had 5 of them! He had decided to share them with the other members of our group; He thought they would make the cabins more homely. It was really nice of him to think of me.

I walked with him to see where everyone else was, all of the cabins were fairly similar, some were very neat and tidy others were a complete disaster area. Troy only offered flowers to the tidy ones, when we got to his cabin, it was very tidy, he had made himself very cosy, his even had a reading lamp. We all chatted for a bit before Emma suggested me head over to the hall for dinner, we were early, so we offered to help set the tables and the offer was gratefully accepted. Tess started singing a song we sing at church and it didn't take much for us all to be singing, Mr Norman was in the office at the end of the hall, he come out to see what was going on. We stopped, thinking we had disturbed him, he told us to keep going, that it was great to sing. He also asked if any one wanted to play the piano to just ask and he would get he key for us. It become our afternoon ritual, everyday we would head to the hall early to set the tables and to sing together.

On a side note, I was really glad I got up early, all of the people that were late to a class were excluded from the dining hall, they all got lunch bags, they also had to write a letter of apology to each of the teachers of the classes that they had missed. Any one that didn't do it by dinner was confined to cabins for the rest of the day; they were only allowed to join the group for meals. A lot of them didn't like this; Tony was one of the loudest complainers. He really was a princess, he didn't help in any way, and he expected everyone to bring him what he wanted and to clear his dishes. He complained that no one made his bed, that no one woke him up; he was a complete pain, worst of all he called his dad and he was told he had to stay there until his mom got back from Europe. This was the deal;

he got to go to the camp she got to go away with his sister. He was not happy! Walking back towards the cabins that evening he was complaining that he wanted to go home, everyone ignored him and one person even pointed out that he was a big boy he should start acting like it. It was embarrassing to watch his outburst in the dining hall, I was really glad no one knew I used to have a crush on him.

The next 3 weeks passed in a blur, it was really hard work but also great fun, firm friendships were formed and when I wrote to my parents I could honestly say I was having a great time and that this was the best gift ever. During the time I was there a lot of the people that didn't show up to classes left, those few that remained did so because their parents wouldn't come get them. Tony was one of these people, he hated it, and he wanted to go home and he only come out of his cabin for food. I used to really like him but now I could see his true colours, I was really glad I had. I was also really glad I met Troy, he was awesome. At the end of the 3rd week roles were given out for the end of camp play. We were doing Romeo and Juliet; it was the ultimate to get one of the big roles. I didn't think I had a chance. At the announcement Troy was announced as Romeo, we all congratulated him, I thought Emma would get Juliet, she was so good, when I was announced I almost passed out. Everyone was around me congratulating me, it was at about this time that Tony stood up and had a little outburst that he should be Romeo. He hadn't even shown up to a class, so there was no way he was going to Romeo, everyone laughed at him. I felt sort of sorry for him but I also knew that he was the lazy one, I had worked really hard.

I rang my parents and told them that I got the lead in the end of program play and that it was Romeo and Juliet, I was so excited. My mum said that they would come up for the play and bring me home. The play was the last night, parents were always invited and they could stay in one of the unused cabins. I really missed my parents, this was a great experience but it would be great to see them. What I didn't know is that I would see them before the last night of camp.

The next few days were a blur; there were rehearsals, costume fittings, people running around making sets. It really made me excited, I really couldn't wait for the performance; I had never really been into drama before, I did it at school because I was expected to but I could see how it people would really enjoy it. With two days until the big night, I was exhausted; so after dinner I decided to have an early night, I went back to the cabin, locked my door and run a bath. I

enjoyed the bath, it felt so good, I got out when I realised I had nodded off in the bath, I woke up with a jolt, I must have dropped my head into the water and the splash woke me, so I got out, I dried off and put on my all in one pyjamas, I wasn't going to bring them but my mum packed them just in case. I was glad she did, it was nice to have something so comfy, I fell on the bed and into a deep sleep. I didn't even say my prayers for the first time since I had been at camp!

I woke at some point to a loud noise; I didn't know what it was but the next thing I knew there was some one on top of me, I tried to scream but couldn't make the sound come. I kicked and shoved, who ever it was, was much heavier and stronger than me. They also smelled like beer, it was awful, I grabbed my water bottle and tried to hit them, I missed him but the bottle slid out of my hand and hit the window by the bed, breaking the glass pane in it; a little bit later, possibly a few seconds, the light was turned on.

The breaking window was heard by one of our teachers, I found out then that the weight on me was Tony, he was almost naked, he was only wearing a t-shirt, Mr Norman, grabbed him and locked him in my bathroom, he checked I was ok and called the police, He took me out the front of the cabin to see if I was ok, I was very shaken. Emma heard the commotion and come to check on me, I was in shock and shaking quite badly by the time she arrived. Mr Norman didn't want us to go back inside, he didn't want us to mess with the scene although it sounded like the bathroom was going to be completely trashed, I could hear crashing and banging. The police arrived quickly, I told them what had happened as far as I knew. They had a look at the cabin, took some photos then retrieved Tony from my bathroom. Emma when back to her cabin to get a spare blanket to wrap around me, I was shaking although I doubt it was from the cold, heaps of people showed up to see what was going on, I was happy to have the blanket, typical I was in my daggy pyjamas and this happened! Not that I was honestly thinking that at the time. The police noticed that I was quite battered and insisted that I go to the hospital to be checked out.

Mr Norman took me to the hospital himself; he got me all sorted then went to the police station to make his formal statement. At the hospital they checked me over, it was then I realised my wrist really hurt, they x-rayed it and it was broken, they had to call my parents, they explained what had happened and that they needed there permission to treat me. The police also arrived at the hospital and asked for my pyjamas, photos and my statement, the nurse was awesome she

gave me some thing for the pain, helped me out of my pyjamas; got me some new pyjamas and took heaps of photos, it was a bit intimidating, the lady police officer was in the room, she was funny, she kept making jokes, they used a special camera that can see bruising before it is visible. They told me I was going to have a lot of bruises and the next week or so was not going to be much fun. They got me dressed again then the doctor come to set my wrist, he did a bandage first then he x-rayed it again, he was happy and I gained a plaster, it was really light, I remember when I broke my arm when I was little it seemed to weigh a ton.

I was put into a bed and I think they gave me something because I was asleep in a few minutes. When I woke up my mum and dad were there, so was Mr Norman, it seemed he was trying to explain what happed. I found it interesting because not even I knew. My parent noticed I was awake and they told me we were going home as soon as the hospital said I could. I objected, I was Juliet; I had worked hard for it. I pleaded with them to let me stay, even if I couldn't be in the play; I wanted to see my friends. Mr Norman said there was no reason I couldn't do it but only if the doctor and my parents said I could. Beside my attacker was no longer around, I also really wanted to see my friends, to tell them I was ok, my parents reluctantly agreed but only if they could stay for the last few days. When the doctor gave me the all clear we drove back to the camp, everyone was having lunch, it was so good to see everyone, although the hugs hurt, it was a good hurt, it proved I was alive.
I went back to my cabin, it was totally trashed, and the police had taken all of the linen and a few other things. It was decided I would move into another cabin, one where my parents could stay close by. I was so happy to see my Romeo, he looked so concerned, he didn't want to hug he thought he might hurt me, but I got my hug! I was so blessed to have such awesome friends. After lunch I went to rehearsal, we had the first full rehearsal, Mr Norman told me to take it easy and if it was too much to sit out, that we could rehearse with a stand in, the past 12 hours had been tough but he would have won if I had not forged ahead. I stumbled a couple of times at the beginning, but after a really big laugh, we all found our rhythm and it was amazing.

After rehearsal I was feeling very tired, I went back to find that Emma had collected all of my things in my cabin and put them in the same place in my new cabin, the bed was made, everything was clean, she even washed all of my dirty clothes. I also found a gift of new toothbrush, hairbrush and bathroom essentials

in my bathroom; they decided that I wouldn't want them. I found out years later that they were all in the toilet, they were right, I would not have wanted them. I laid down, I was only intending to rest for an hour or so but my mum woke me up on the way to dinner, I got up and washed my face, I was really hungry, something that is unusual for me, it must be the tablets for the pain in my wrist. We had dinner, it was a bit weird to have may parents there, they sat with the teachers but it was still weird.

I introduced them to all my new friends. They were really impressed; they were more impressed when Emma offered to stay in my cabin with me, so I wouldn't be afraid. It was lovely to have some one that loved me for me. It was also nice to have some one nearby on the first night, I was a little scared but I didn't want to appear weak, having Emma there with me was nice. We prayed together then we both turned in, the story she tells is I was asleep before my head hit my pillow, she may have been right!

The next morning we got back into the old routine, Troy picked me up and walked me to breakfast, we had our dress rehearsal, it went terribly, and everything that could go wrong did. Afterwards at lunch Mr Norman said it was all going to be fine, that we should all rest up and get ready for the main performance, we would have one final walk through the next morning and that was it! We were ready! Now I was really concerned! If this was all good, I hated to think was bad was going to consist of.

That afternoon we spent a little bit of time praying together, then we did our usual songs of praise while setting up for dinner. My parents were out on the deck while we were doing it and were amazed at the group we had formed. My wrist really hurt so I just watched and sang we also had a little prayer about my wrist and about our one and only performance the next night! We all turned in early again, Emma slept in with me, it was really sweet, and I mean she didn't have to do it but she chose to! We prayed some more, talked and eventually went to sleep. It was only about 10 pm but somehow we managed to sleep through the alarm, Troy knocked on the door at 6.30 and we were both still in bed! Oops not a great start to the day, we both rushed to throw some water over our faces and pull on some clothes. We made it to breakfast and to our final walk through rehearsal, not quite awake but close enough.

After the rehearsal I had to have some alterations to one of my costumes done, so I hung around, everyone else was going up to the dining hall for a snack, then we all had some quiet time.

It was decided we would have dinner early, we had heaps of parents and friends coming, and they were all being offered dinner while we got changed and got ready for the performance. After dinner heaps of students waited to greet their parents before going to the hall to get ready.

Since my parents were already there, I decided to headed down early, Troy come down with me and we went over a couple of bits. Then we prayed together. The others joined us and we said a word of pray as a group, everyone that wanted to be included was! Then it was time to get into costume, make up and a quick sound check, the worst time was after all of that was done, I was sitting in my cardboard dressing area, alone with my thoughts. I felt fear but something in my heart told me I was strong enough, I was good enough, I knew it was my god. I took a deep breath, and walked up to my place. The play went really well, I remember all of my lines, and no one made any mistakes, even the props and the set all stayed together. It was an amazing feeling, I was on a total high, and at that moment I had no pain, now I knew why people would do this. The girls working on the costumes had made me a dress to wear to the after party, it was so pretty, when I stepped out of the girls change room, Troy was waiting for me, it seems he got an outfit too, although his was a long tunic and tights, he took it all in good humour, as he usually did but I cracked up laughing.

At the after party, Troy introduced his parents to my parents, it turns out they already knew each other, typical, heap of the parents knew each other. Lots of people come up and congratulated me on such a great performance. It was really nice that people had a great time! I also had a couple of agents approach me and ask if I wanted to make some money out of acting, I said I wasn't sure, my parents took their card politely and some of them my dad gave his business card to. It think it was more being polite, I was enjoying my last day at camp, I was also sad to be leaving my friends. We all exchanged addresses and phone numbers but I knew it wouldn't be the same. On the last night we all slept in my cabin, there were 12 of us, mattresses on the floor and bodies everywhere. I don't think my parents were that impressed by the sleeping arrangement but they kept quiet, besides with that many of us, what was going to happen. It was a very late night; we all woke up after 10! We all packed our things and cleaned up our

cabins, Troy come to carry my bags to my parents car. I wanted to go back on the bus but my parents insisted on me going with them. I said I very teary good bye and got in the car, as we were about to leave, Mr Norman ran up to the car, he had a bag, he passed it through the window to me, it was the dress, he said it was mine to keep and that he really hoped I would be back next summer.

On the drive home, I had a little sleep, we really didn't get much sleep the night before, when I woke up my mum and dad were talking about me changing schools. I pretended to be asleep, I wanted to know what they were thinking about, but my mum having mum radar knew I was awake. She asked me if I would be up for changing schools, I said I would think about it. She said she was concerned that the thing with Tony would make my old school uncomfortable since he was most likely still going to be a student and that I could move to another school, it would mean a bus ride to school rather than a walk. I really wasn't sure, I had friends at school, I knew everyone, then she said the magic words, I could go to school with Emma, Troy and a few others from camp. I was in, I didn't want to sound excited but I was tired and it just sort of bubbled out of me!

The next few weeks passed really quickly, I started at a new school, it was awesome, the teachers were really nice and I got to be in a home group with Emma! Tony was charged with assault and battery as well as attempted sexual assault, his parents were not happy and contacted my parents many times to get them to drop the charges, they offered us a new home, new cars and a holiday home, but my dad insisted that we do not give in to them. That he would do it again and that he needed to learn a lesson. It was hard and the court case was awful, I was called into court as a witness, I was with my dad but it was still hard. I told them everything I could remember and I was excused, Mr Norman, Emma and Troy were also called along with the camp organizer and some of the other teachers. In the end he was found guilty, he was sentenced to serve 3 years in juvenile detention and serve a 5 year good behaviour bond, his parents were charged with attempting to pervert the course of justice and both had to do 200 hours of community work. I naturally thought that this would be the end of it but it wasn't, Tony would write to me 2 or 3 times a week it was all a bit freaky and my dad agreed. He contacted the detention centre and advised them of what was happening, the letter stopped coming after that.

Not long after that my dad come home from work on a Friday night and told my mum and I that perhaps we should move house, that this house was too big for the 3 of us and that since my siblings never stayed when they visited any more that perhaps it was time to downsize. My mum and I looked at each other and started laughing, this really confused my dad, and he looked at us like we had lost our minds. What made us laugh is that my mum picked me up from school and we had seen a house for sale and had both commented that our house was too big and it took too long to look after. So the next morning we went house hunting, we had a look at the house near the school and it was lovely, we also had a look at some other houses, nothing really made us excited, then on the Sunday we were on our way home from church and we seen an open for inspection board, we were not in any hurry so we called in, it was perfect!

It was the most beautiful house; it had 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and everything else we wanted. The bonus was that it was really cheap and brand new, it still needed some of the light fittings and curtains but they were things my mum would change any way. My dad made an offer that day, we went home and my parents called another estate agent to come and put our house on the market. The agent come on Monday night, my parents did the paperwork and I was told to have a big clean up, that the first open inspection would be on the weekend. While the agents was at the house the other agent rang to say that our offer on the other house was accepted and that they needed to come and get us to do the paperwork. This was all really exciting but also a bit scary, this was the only home I had ever known.

I was also on my way to film my first movie, after the camp we were contacted by a couple of agents, my dad spoke to them and he said if the right role come up that he might let me do it. A few weeks later we started getting offers of work, everything from commercials to movies! My dad was strict about what I could and couldn't do; he let me go to a couple of screen tests but always with my mum. When I was offered a role in a Disney movie, he said I could go but only if they met his demands, they did and so I was preparing for 3 weeks away from my parents in Canada. I was really excited about the project, it was only a fairly small part but I would get to meet and work with the people from Disney. My school was really good about it, they gave me heaps of work to do, so I packed my suitcase, cleaned up my room and made sure I had every thing I could packed away. I left a couple of days later, not bus this time, Disney sent a car to collect me, then we flew to Vancouver then a long drive to the set.

By the time I arrived I was exhausted, I rang my mum quickly to let her know I was there safe and promised to ring on Sunday after the open inspection. The accommodation was really nice, I had a smallish room, and it was warm and clean. On the first day we did a read through of the script, it was fairly simple but one of the other girls had all sorts of trouble with it. The director asked me to read her part, it was much bigger than mine but it was fairly easy, she was upset by this and stormed out of the room. We were told about an hour later that she had left; she was going home, so I was offered her role and a local girl was offered my role. It was a much bigger role, but they had called my dad and he said if I wanted it, I could do it, was he kidding of course I wanted it!

After lunch on day 1 I had a costume fitting, I was a little smaller than the other actress, but most of it was fine, only a few small alterations, at dinner we were all told to get an early night, that most of us needed to be on set at 6am! Now for a girl like me 6 am is still night! But somehow I managed to be dressed, made up and onset at 6 am, the first day was hard, I lost my place a couple of times. The director was really kind to me; he was patient and helped me. Some of the other actors with a lot more experience than me also made mistakes at one point a really big name actor was rolling around on the floor laughing because he just couldn't seem to get the words out.

The first few days of filming went really fast, they didn't film on a Sunday if they could help it, so Sunday I slept in, did some schoolwork and went for a drive with some of the crew to see the area. I was way behind in my schoolwork and I knew my dad would be unhappy but I just didn't have the energy after filming. I rang my parents to find out how everything was going, they had accepted an offer on the house, the catch was the new people wanted to move in sooner than we expected. It was fine, it was the week after we got the keys to the new house but it would make it a busy week. I told my mum all about the change in role, she was really happy, I also told my dad that my schoolwork was suffering but that I would make it up. My dad seemed really happy, not something that was common for him but it was nice to hear him laugh. The next 2 weeks went past quickly, the movie was finished filming 4 days early, so we all got to go home early, I was excited, I called my mum to let her know when I was due back. They told me the movie would now go into editing, and I might be needed for a few hours here or there but that they would let me know and that it would be done in the local studio. So no more travelling! Yay!

I got home to complete chaos, my mum had started cleaning out the attic and the basement, everything seemed to be in the living room, and I found her and my dad in the kitchen making out! I surprised them! As part of her recovery my mum put me straight to work, we only had 3 weeks until we moved and we needed to get rid of some stuff before we did. My dad being my dad ordered a really big bin, he had it placed in the garage and encouraged us to fill it! We had no issue with that we had so much rubbish. I went back to school the following Monday, my dad let me have a couple of days off after I got home off, although I did see Troy and Emma on the weekend. It was so good to see them; I don't think I ever had friends like these before. Troy asked me to the upcoming dance at school, of course I said yes, I really missed Troy, after church on Sunday Troy come to the old house, he got me up to speed with school and where we were at, he also helped my mum drag stuff to the bin and ended up staying for dinner, my dad was so impressed when he said grace!

After dinner, Troy's parents come to pick him up, they also ended up helping with the big clean out although they were putting things in their car, Troy's mum volunteered at the local good will store and said a lot of things in the bin would be able to find a new home. She and my mum decided to get together the next day and see what else we could give.

On the Monday I went back to school, it was ok because I hadn't missed that much and Troy had filled me in on most things. It was also very cool to have a date for the dance, I was asked by a couple of guys but I could honestly say there was no one I would rather go to the dance with. The big house clean out continued, my mum was cleaning out her wardrobe when I got home one day, and she found her prom dress and her wedding dress in the same box. She was going to give them to charity but I made her keep them. I tried on her prom dress, it was too big but it was so pretty. That Friday after school my mum and I went shopping for a dress for the dance, she bought me the most beautiful pale blue dress, she also bought the shoes and the bag! I felt so special!

Two weeks later, the house was pretty much packed, the removalist was booked, everything was going to plan then my dad announces over a pizza dinner that he is going to retire next year and do pro bono work. My dad is a lawyer and pro bono basically means he will do charity work, he will work for free to help people who would not be able to pay for it. Not what we expected but I know my mum

was happy, she was looking forward to him not working the long hours. It was also during this time that Troy declared his love for me, he wasn't sure how I would take it but the feeling was mutual, we were definitely a couple and I was fine for the world to know that. I told my parents and they were surprised that it took us that long!

Fast forward a fortnight, we have moved into our new home, most things have found their rightful place, the house is still not completely sorted but the old house is completely empty and has been cleaned ready for the new family.

I get home from school, it is now only a short walk, we also walk to church, it is awesome, I got a letter from Disney, it is the invitation to the pre-screening of the movie, there are 6 tickets, I of course give 2 to my parents, 2 to Troy's parents, then Troy and I, make up the 6. I was really anxious about inviting Troy and his parents, I really want them to like me, I think I love Troy and I would hate for them to think I was showing off!

On the night of the screening I was a bit scared, what if this is awful! Troy cuddled me and said that no matter what he will still have me, so sweet! It was a cold night, it had just started snowing, the movie was going to be released the day after Christmas but we had this opportunity to see it before the big launch. There was going to be a big public launch a couple of days before Christmas, the studio had already arranged the most amazing dress for me, and they also sent me tickets for my parents and for Troy to attend with me, but I wouldn't get to see it, that's why they had the screening night.

When we got to the studio, I went to sit with the cast and crew, the director stood up and said a few words then the movie started, it was a bit weird but it was also awesome, I was amazed how good it was, I even forgot that it was me on the screen. The special effects were amazing, I never imagined it would be a true big screen movie, I think on some level I thought it would be like the home movies my dad made. After the movie everyone come up to congratulate me, it was nice of everyone to say so but I really wanted to see what my parents thought. It took them a little while to get close to me and they told me they were so proud of me. It was really nice that they were happy with the movie, they had Troy and his parents with them, and Troy gave me a big hug! It felt a bit weird, like something was not quite right. I had no idea what was going on.

I just let it be, the next morning I went back to school, it was the week of the dance and I was really looking forward to it. When I got to school Troy was no where to be seen it was a bit odd, I thought maybe he was sick, I kept looking for him all day. When I got home I called him, he stayed home, he wasn't feeling well, I asked him if we were still going to the dance together. He said if I still wanted to he was still up for it. I asked him what he meant, he said that now I was going to be a big star I would want some one better looking or richer than he was, I told him that was crap, I loved him, for him, me being in a movie had nothing to do with us! I also told him that he had to get a suit for the premiere of the movie, because if he wasn't going the take me then I wasn't going.

The next morning he was at school waiting for me, he kissed me in front of a huge group of people; it was such a shock to so many people. It was before lunch when some one told Troy's mum, who in turn told my mum and I had a "please explain" message on my phone. Maybe being well known was going to be harder than I thought. The rest of the week went past in a flash, all of the girls finished early on Friday to get ready for the dance, my mum surprised me at school by picking me up and taking me to have my hair and makeup done, when we got home my dad was home, much earlier than usual. He took some photos while I got into my dress, I looked in my mum's big mirror and I was very happy with the end result. I was touching up my lipstick when the doorbell rang it was Troy; I waited a few seconds after my mum answered to walk down the hall to the entranceway.

He looked so handsome in his tux. He gave me a huge smile and there was a look of awe on his face, I knew this was going to be a very special night, he gave me the corsage he was holding and kissed me on the lips, right in front of my parents, he helped me put the corsage on then he gave me another little box, this one contained a ring, it was a simple little signet ring but it meant the world to me. He told me it was a promise ring and that he promised to love me forever. I wanted to cry but held back the tears knowing they would ruin my make up and make me look like a complete baby. I gave him a small box as well, it contained a small cross on a gold chain, and it was a symbol of love for him. He put the chain on, well my mum helped, and I put the ring on.

Then we said good-bye to my parents and went outside. There was a horse drawn carriage waiting for us, it was fairly cold but there was a rug in the carriage to share, my dad must have taken about a million photos, then we left for the

short trip to school, at school our arrival caused a bit of a stir, there were more photos taken. I was glad when we got inside, at least it was warm, we danced together for the first part of the night then they had the king and queen crowning, lots of my friends said I would be queen but I doubted it, it was always a senior, and I was right, the head cheerleader got queen and her jock boyfriend got king.

We had a lovely night, lots of photos were taken, and everyone had a laugh! We got home fairly late, Troy and I walked to my home, it was only a short walk and it was nice to cool down. When we got to my place my parents were still up, it was after mid night but my mum wanted to see how it was and my dad stayed up because my mum was up. My dad drove Troy home, taking with him some of the photos he had taken.

Troy's mum and dad were up as well, for a totally different reason, Troy's older brother had a car accident, and they were just about to leave for the hospital, my dad offered to drive them. They were really upset and my dad didn't mind. My dad called home to let us know what was going on, Troy changed out of his tux and into his sweats and my dad drove them to the hospital. My dad stayed with them at the hospital and in the morning when Ben lost the battle and passed away, my mum and I went to the hospital as well. Troy was really upset, there was nothing I could do, so we just sat in the chapel holding hands and praying together.

It was really a reminder of how fragile life was. Ben's funeral was the following Wednesday, it was a really hard day; I told Troy that if he wanted to skip the movie premiere he could, that I would be ok. He said that was the thing that kept him going and that he was looking forward to it. I was secretly pleased, I really wanted to share this with him but I also know that grief can take time.

So the next night I get all dressed up again for the premiere, this time the studio arranged for the hair and make up and the limo, it was all very glamorous, it's a pity making the movies isn't that much fun. At the premiere everything went to plan, I had my photo taken a lot, people asked me stupid questions I smiled, everyone loved the movie, we go home really late and Troy got to sleep in the guest room. The next morning, not feeling so bright or glamorous I meet Troy in the kitchen, he looks like a million dollars I look like hell. My makeup has turned on me, I had panda eyes and a puffy face, he still greets me with a kiss, my dad decides to comment that if he can see me like that and still be excited to see me

that perhaps we should get married. We both look at him with disbelief on our faces. I can see my dad is serious! My mum starts laughing, not a natural laugh but a nervous laugh, it sets everyone else off. It was something I had thought about but I was only 15, almost 16, I had a while before I wanted to get married yet.

The premiere was huge, it was on all of the news stations, I was even on entertainment tonight, and I thought it was all very odd and false. However with the end of school, I had to catch up lost time and I had my exams then I was free for 6 whole weeks, besides it was Christmas and I loved Christmas.

It was really weird after the movie come out, friends of my parents that I had never met were suddenly ringing, and people from church that used to avoid us were asking me for autographs. I found it really hard to adjust; I also got heaps of movies offers, some that were interesting but most were movies I didn't want to have anything to do with.

During the holidays Troy practically moved in with us, his parents were having trouble coming to terms with Ben's death, so he spent most of the holidays with us. It was awesome! It was also nice to have some one to keep me grounded; we would play games, watch movies and just sit on the couch and cuddle. We also prayed together and studied our bibles; we motivated each other to do the reading for the next semester at school. Some of the books were awful, but together we managed to get through it. It was also during this time that my mum decided to have the birds and bees talk with me, it was hilarious, I think I knew more than she did, we had sex ed at school. I had made a promise to God to stay pure and in return he gave me Troy. It seemed like a good swap, both Troy and I had taken the same vow so we had no issue. When I told my mum this she as both impressed and shocked, she knew we were in love but clearly she forgot that God was on our team.

It was not long after this that Tess from drama camp called to congratulate me on my first big movie. She also told me that she had cancer, she had it as a child but it had come back. It was really hard to think that my friend was struggling with this awful disease. I talked to my mum and it was decided that we would get a car of people and drive to see her. A week later my mum, Troy, Emma and I set off on a 4 hour drive to see Tess, When we got here she was so weak, she was excited to see us but something told me she was not in great shape. I was right,

when Tess mum got there she told us that the doctors said she only had days, it was really hard to hear. We all formed a prayer circle around her, we prayed and we sang and we prayed some more. We were planning to drive home but it was late and the weather was a bit icy so my mum got a motel room and we all stayed, my mum rang my dad then Troy's parents and Emma's mum. She had just hung up when Tess mum rang to say she was gone. We all had a cry, it was really hard to say good-bye but I knew she was in a better place. We spent some time the next day with her family, then we headed back to our homes, I was really looking forward to a hug from my dad.

We dropped Emma home first, then we went to drop Troy off, his parents weren't at home, so he come home with us, my mum called them and told them he was at our place and to just call when they got home and my mum would bring him home. They didn't call, my dad took Troy home to get some clothes, and it was really odd that they had not been home, maybe they had gone away or there was some emergency. My dad knew they had some financial issues but he didn't know how bad they were. My dad told Troy to get enough stuff for a few days, in case they had gone away, so they wouldn't have to keep coming back. While they were there the police knocked on the door, it was surreal, it seems that his parents had committed suicide together in the car. It was a huge blow for Troy, first his brother then both of his parents, my dad rang us to tell us what had happened, and then he packed Troy and most of his things in the car and bought him home. He was in deep shock when he got there. My mum assured him that he could live with us, that they would get it all sorted out and that he shouldn't worry about it.

I didn't know what to say, so I hugged! I know it sounds corny but he was in shock and I had no idea what I should say or do. My dad sorted out most of the arrangements, people from the church helped and a week later there was the funeral, it was really hard for Troy and for me, I wanted to be there for him but I felt useless, my dad insisted that he go to grief counselling and that seemed to help. My dad also found their legal papers, and as he had suspected everything went to Troy, not that there was going to be much. They had some huge debts and selling the house was just enough to cover the debts and the funeral, it seems that when Ben died they both stopped working and had borrowed heavily against the house. Troy was left with some personal items and a few thousand dollars, as promised Troy moved in with us, at first it was weird but once I got used to it, I really liked it.

The movie I did went really big, far bigger than I or any one on the movie thought it would, it made it really interesting because now we had people taking photographs of us everywhere. A photo of Troy and I kissing was on the front page of Cosmo, I was horrified, everyone seen it. We debated moving house again, but decided to stick it out. It also made it hard for everyone at school, they were being asked questions about us and being offered money to take our photos, everyone was really nice but I know it was hard for some people. This was really hard on Troy, he had just lost his parents and now he was dealing with this. We sat down as a family and talked about how we were going to deal with it and what we were going to do about it. We knew if we stuck together it would all be fine, the only problem we had is that my older sister sold a few of my baby photos to the tabloids and told them stories, she was paid a fair bit of money for the stories, it really hurt that she did that but I wasn't really surprised. In the middle of it all my brother, John, come home for a visit, he had been in Afghanistan with the marines, when he heard about what his sister had done he wanted to visit her but my dad said not to worry about it. We were really wondering why we sold the bigger house as well, with so many people in this one it was getting a bit crowded, it was fun and it was great to see how well John and Troy got on.

John really helped Troy work through his grief and one night at dinner, John announced that we was leaving the marines, I know it was a really big deal for John and I wondered what it was all about but it would be nice to have a big brother. John returned to base for a couple of weeks, then received his discharge and come to live at home with us for a little while. Emma was smitten with John, he was a lot older than her but she followed him around, they really become an item, it was a bit weird and nice all at the same time.

When I got the offer to audition for a regular sitcom, I was really interested, it was being filmed locally, and I begged my dad to let me do it. He was sceptical but he took me to the screen test and the first reading, he said I could do it but only if I maintained my grades, it was really hard at first but Troy really helped me, the sitcom got far bigger than any of us thought it would. It was ok because I graduated from college in the middle of the first season, I intended to go to university but that was all put on hold for the show.

My dad was so sick of everyone living on top of each other so, the decision was made that we would be moving again, this time we decided to move to a new apartment building that was almost complete, they had been building it for ages but it was not far from our home. We had a look and it was amazing, we pooled our money and purchased 2 penthouse apartments so we bought the top floor, it gave us 6 bedrooms, so plenty of room for everyone, it was decided that John and Troy would share one and I would share the other one with my parents. It worked really well!

Once we got past the moving thing, we had people all over the house while we were packing and there were fans at the house, it was not easy or fun but we got through it. We did have to get John to scare people off from time to time but the security of the new building was really nice. It was not long after we moved that Troy proposed to me, I of course said yes, we announced our engagement to our family and friends at the house warming party. Some one told the media and it somehow becomes front-page news; it must have been a really slow news day.

After we were engaged we were bombarded with a million media requests, I decided not to do most, we did go on Leno together it was really fun, he asked when we were getting married, I replied, at some point. I didn't want it to be a media circus but it was going to be really hard to arrange. My mum had a brain wave that we have a surprise wedding, we go to church one Sunday and get married after the service, it was sheer brilliance, we discussed it and we were both happy with the plan, then we went to our pastor and let him in on the plan, he was happy to do it. We did the paperwork that day with him, and then we started the planning. I asked Emma to be my maid of honour, Troy asked John, my parents agreed that my mum would walk Troy down the aisle and my dad would walk me. I wanted to wear my mums dress, we dug it out of her wardrobe, it was a little bit big but my mum was able to make the alterations so no one would get wind of what was going on. Every one involved was sworn to secrecy, the date was set, and the people I work with were all invited to our church, with a whispered side note about what was really going on. The media had always been really good about not coming to church with us; they would take photos of us coming and going but never come inside. My mum arranged the ladies at the church to make a light lunch for everyone, flowers were secreted in and hidden in the office, toy boxes packed with dresses, shoes and everything else were delivered and stashed in the corner of offices.

Then the big day come, we arrived at church as usual, when asked about why cast and crew where there, they all said they had been invited and since I was the youngest member of the cast they had decided to come for me.

No one in the congregation had any idea, I snuck out after the first part of the service, I secreted upstairs to our pastors office with Emma and my mum, we all got dressed and get ready. A close friend who is a photographer was there and had no idea what was going on until my mum asked him in to take some photos. Troy, John and my dad were in the room next-door, not exactly traditional but it worked. After the service our pastor announced that everyone was also welcome to stay for a very joyous occasion of a wedding. No body knew whom, but they all stayed seated waiting. Then my mum, Troy and John walked down the aisle. Everyone cheered! The pastor asked everyone to not ring or tell any one until after it was all over, he really didn't want the media coming in and ruining everything. I was waiting just outside the door, I wanted to run down the aisle and just get it over with, but my dad made me wait and walk so slowly down the aisle, it was lovely to feel so special. We said our vows, signed the book and we were married, it all happened so quickly.

I made a short speech to the congregation and asked them to keep it under their hat, that it was fine to have some photos but please don't sell them. Then we all went out to the big hall and enjoyed some sandwiches and everyone loved the cupcake wedding cake, it was huge and beautiful, they had done an amazing job. We had heaps of photos taken with everyone, my mums beautiful dress was the subject of conversation. Then we all went home, there were media all over the place at home, it was really funny when we got out of my dads car in our wedding garb. They went into a frenzy!

The next day we had hundreds of request for our time, we ignored all of them and took a week off, we were going to go away but instead decided to stay home, we had to move around the houses, so Troy and I had one apartment and John moved into my old room with my parents. It worked for us but not so much for John.

Not that it really mattered because John was going to have a whole lot to explain really soon. About a month after our wedding, Emma called me at work, something she never did, she was really upset, so I agreed to catch up with her the next day. I was really concerned about her, she was so upset so I called into

see her on the way home, it turned out she was pregnant with Johns baby. She wanted to tell John but had no idea how to broach the subject, so I invited her home for dinner; I called my mum on the way to let her know Emma was coming for food. It was not that unusual, Emma was at our place 2 or 3 nights a week, when we arrived my mum knew something was wrong, she asked me in the kitchen what was going on. I told her all would be revealed soon, she just shook her head; she didn't like surprises so I told her, and she went into my dad's office and told him! My dad was furious; he comes storming out and smacked John in the back of the head. John not having a clue what was going on got a bit upset by this, Emma burst into tears, so John goes to comfort Emma and John's starts asking what is going on. Emma tells him she is pregnant with his baby, I think she was a bit worried about what he would say. He surprised all of us by being really excited after the initial shock wore off!

Three months later, there was a second wedding in the family, this time it was John and Emma. It wasn't really planned but it was a really happy event, Emma was a beautiful bride and I was her matron of honour. It is really funny how life turns out, my sister was invited to John's wedding but she chose not to attend, she didn't seem to want to have anything to do with us, we were fine with this but I know my mum was hurt by it. She never got to see my sister's children, but not through a lack of trying.

John and Emma lived with my parents for a month or so then they bought an apartment in the same building. It was smaller that the one we had but plenty big enough for them, it was really nice to have our own space but be so close together, we still went to my parents a few times a week to eat but otherwise we all lived separate lives.

In the course of time Emma gave birth the most beautiful little girl, she decided to call her Teresa after our friend Tess, she called Tess mum to see if it was ok and she thought it was a lovely idea. She was a heavily photographed baby, everyone loved her, and her dad adored her. When baby Tess war barely 1 she was joined by her brother, Aiden.

But back to me, the sitcom was great we really enjoyed making it but after 3 years on the show it was closed down. The director really wanted it to go out on a high, I was fine with that, Troy was at uni and I really wanted to do something else. I had been doing this for so long that I really wanted to something new.

Troy was in his final year of medicine, so I decided to follow my dad and study law. I took the enrolment exam and passed it easily, I was accepted into a great local university, it was a whole new world, and it was awesome, I was just another first year. We were also really lucky because we didn't have to worry about tuition like a lot of other students. Troy was doing his internship and they were paying him more than enough to support us, we owned the apartment and we had saved most of the money I had earned. We didn't go without but we didn't live a Hollywood lifestyle either. It was nice not to have to worry about it, we had a nice car that we shared, heaps of people thought we would both have expensive cars but we didn't need it and we were happy with our little car. Everything was going along fine until I got pregnant, I was in my third year of law, we had planned to start our family after I passed the bar exam but it didn't happen to plan.

I was working for my dads old firm, I didn't tell them immediately but when I did they were less than impressed. It was all ok though, I managed to pass the bar exam while I was 38 weeks pregnant, they were all really impressed by my work ethic, and they asked me to come back after the baby was born.

Our first baby was born the following week, our beautiful son, Peter, was born amid much fuss and bother, he was perfect, but I have to admit that the first few weeks were really tough. It was great to have my mum so close and my fabulous sister in law down stairs, Emma told me to be really careful because it is really easy to get pregnant for the first four or five months after giving birth but I forgot and when I was getting ready to go back to work I found myself pregnant again! The second pregnancy was really hard on my body, the demands of a young baby and then going through it all again.

I called the law firm I had been intending to return to and told them I would not be coming back. They were concerned that I was going elsewhere and even sent a senior partner to come see me, they thought it was hilarious why I wasn't coming back, they also said that when I was ready I should let them know. The other thing that made the second pregnancy hard is that it was twins, I thought I was huge the first time, but I was so much bigger, the really scary thing is that as a friend of Troy's pointed out, we would have 3 children under 2! There was a lot of prayer about all of this but I know that I would not be here if I couldn't cope with

it. The best thing is that Troy had fully qualified and was working in a general practice, which meant that he was home at regular hours!

When the twins arrived everyone was very excited, the girls arrived on my birthday, so on my 23rd birthday I welcomed babies, Eleanor and Naomi, Eleanor after my mum and Naomi after nana. It was amazing but so overwhelming. Troy was a great dad but we both agreed that 3 was plenty so it was decided that he would have a vasectomy, it was technically against our church but I didn't want to have any more children or have to remember to take pills etc. It really was the best solution.

The next few years passed in a blur of diaper changes, play dates and laundry, when I emerged from the blur, Peter was starting school, he was 4 and very independent, the twins were at kindergarten, everyday from 9 to 2, it was a bit hard at first, but then I decided to go back to work. I called the law firm I had passed the bar exam with and they were happy to accept me back. I started back 3 days a week as a legal secretary; although I was qualified I wanted to ease back into it. My mum was happy to collect Peter and the twins after school; she said she enjoyed the nana time! Everything was going great, the twins started school, I worked my way up to full time, my mum would walk to school and collect the children at 3 and look after them until 5.15 when I got home, she was also collecting Tess and Aiden, so they all got to play together or get Pa to help them with their home work.

The night before Peter's 7th birthday, I was running around like a maniac trying to make sure everything was all set, we had 10 little boys coming for the party, it was a sleepover and I wanted to make sure everything was all set. Troy come home later than usual, I asked him if he had a tough day, he said it was very tough. He asked me to speak in private, it was an odd request, I though maybe he was sick, in our bedroom he told me he had been having an affair with his business partners wife, that his business partner had found out and was demanding he either resign or he buy him out, I was dumbfounded, then I was even more dumbfounded when he asked me for a large amount of money to buy his partner out.

I told him he had far bigger issues, that he should pack his bags and stay somewhere else. He looked at me innocently and asked why? It was simple, he had an affair, and he was not staying in the house, simple! I went next door and

asked my mum to watch the children for a few minutes, she knew I was upset but didn't ask why, I guess she figured it out when Troy emerged from the bedroom with a bag and a long face. She still didn't ask she just kept on with the birthday preparations. I went for a walk, I really needed to clear my head, it didn't really help, and when I got back I went straight to my dad and told him. He said what I did now was up to me; he would support me no matter what.

I arranged for marriage counselling but Troy didn't see why he should take part, since it was my problem entirely. It was at this time that I decided that it was all over, I could never trust him again, I told him this, and I also told him that he should not expect money from me. I went to the law firms top divorce lawyer, we did the papers and they were served. I had to explain to the kids that dad was not going to live with us any more and they didn't seem to fussed by it all. He rarely spent any time with them any way. The assets register was drawn up, we also had to produce pay records for the term of our marriage and all sorts of other personal documents, it was not easy but when we got to the mediation, Troy asked for the house and half of the bank accounts, he said he didn't want the kids, I offered weekend visitation and he wasn't interested, he said he had better things to do. This was all recorded on a digital video, I offered him about a quarter of the cash assets, he was not happy with this, so we went to court. It took ages to get a court date, when we did the video evidence was tendered, as were all of the records that showed that overall I had contributed more than 3 times what he had, that I was keeping custody of the kids and that he had limited input into the household. He claimed that my parents were meddling, that I never gave him sex and a few other things. In the end the ruling was that he would get about half of what I offered him, no access to the kids and he had no right to the house.

So then I set out on a life as a single mum, without my parents I would have died, but with their support I made it through it all. Troy didn't do so well, his business partner threw him out, he found a job working at a local hospital in the emergency room, it was long hours and not very fun, we talked a few times after the divorce but not much, he never sent the kids birthday or Christmas cards. It was hard on them, they really couldn't understand what they had done, and we worked really hard to make them understand that it was not about them. One of the things we did was take them to a church group for the children of divorced parents, it really helped them, the young associate pastor that run the class was from a broken home and he really understood how they were feeling. I also

become close to the associate pastor, Henry was a really sweet guy, he would pick the kids up on a Friday, he had a walking school bus, well that's what he called it, he would walk to the 2 local schools and gather up the kids and walk them to church, they would play and they would learn, they would then feed them dinner and they would have a great time, I could stay at work for a Friday night drink and pick the kids up on the way home. The program went till 8 but I used to try and get there in time to help with dinner! It also meant I got dinner so I didn't have to think about it.

One Friday night when I went to get them, my parents were there, it was really very odd, they took me off to the senior pastor in his office, I though something terrible had happened to one of the kids, it turns out something terrible did happen, Troy had overdosed on sleeping pills, he had died and no one noticed for over a day, it was only when he didn't turn up for 2 shifts that they raised the alarm. I was a bit shocked but not totally surprised, he always had heaps of pills around, I was always moving them out of reach of the children. But now I was left with another big issue, how do I tell the kids? Peter was 9 and very grown up, so I knew I could tell him but the girls were a little bit younger and I wasn't sure how they would take it. I asked Henry to be with me while I told them, they were really interested and a bit curious, but not upset. I was a little shocked I got a bigger reaction when the lion king DVD got broken. Henry said to give them sometime, to answer their questions honestly and if I needed some one to talk to that I could call him. He was such a sweet heart!

The next week was an interesting one, Troy had no family so I arranged the funeral, our senior pastor was the celebrant, it was a simple ceremony, and the children attended and were interested but really didn't understand what was going on. I wanted them to be there, so that later in life they would know the truth. John and Emma cleaned out his apartment, it was a furnished apartment and there was not much other than some clothes and stuff, they gave all of the clothes to charity, all of his work clothes were returned to the hospital and the box of other things was put in my parents spare room for me to sort out later. It didn't seem like much to represent his life, but then there were only a few people at the funeral, my family made up most of them, a couple of work colleague came and a few people from church come to support me. No one cried! It was very odd, very reserved and it was unnerving.

After the funeral people were invited home to my parents apartment for food and drink, then it was all over! After so long together then the pain of the divorce and everything else it was over, I felt cheated, was this it! And what was next.

The next few years were interesting ones, I was made a partner in the law firm, my dad was very proud, Peter won a scholarship to a very prestigious school, it was a boarding school and I didn't want him to go but he wore me down. The girls both chose very different paths, Eleanor decided she wanted to be an artist, Naomi wanted to follow me, they focused their studies on their goals, Eleanor won a scholarship to the local ballet school, she was very talented and she worked very hard, she was not that impressed but decided to do it anyway.

I guess when you are 9 it is exciting and any path is worth exploring, she was more than a little upset when Naomi was cast in a commercial, she had asked me about getting an agent, I relented and let her list with my old agent. He had called to ask me if I wanted to do an acting job, Naomi had answered the phone, she was tenacious and she was cute. She got cast in a cereal commercial; from that point on she wanted to be an actress like I was. She got a few parts in commercials, my dad was able to take her to screen tests and auditions, she really got started when she was cast in a big movie, she wasn't there to audition for the role, she and my dad were calling in to drop of some new portfolio photos, the director fell in love. She was asked to read, my dad wanted to see what it was first, after some growling, she was allowed to read, she was perfect for the role and she was set to start filming in 5 weeks time. It was being filmed in the school break, but it was still a huge commitment. She took it all in her stride and before we knew it she was in a hit Christmas movie. It was all very surreal, I had been there, and I knew first hand what it was like. We did some media together, it was actually fun but then it stopped being fun.

Tony the boy who had assaulted me all those years ago suddenly popped up again, he was outside my building at work, I called the police but there was nothing they could do about it. He also showed up near the apartment, it made me a bit paranoid, fortunately we were all about to head off as a family on a promotional tour for the movie, I was looking forward to getting away, it had been a while since we had been anywhere.

Peter who was now 13 and the girls 12 were all excited as well, we stayed in some amazing motels, did all of the premieres as a family and when we got back

there were literally hundreds of job offers for Naomi, she seemed to deal with it far better than I did. She discussed many things with her grandfather and in the end she chose to do a second movie with the same director, this one had more action and was a bit more grown up, my dad agreed to stay on set with her and to travel to the locations with her.

Tony was still floating around but we had not seen him close by for a while, then a really scary thing happened, Naomi was staying with the rest of the crew at a motel about 2 hours drive away, her stunt double was at the same motel, her stunt double was raped and murdered. Since we had a history with Tony, my dad told the police about last time and how he had been seen around, they compared the DNA and it was a match. They think it might have been mistaken identity, on the news they announced that it was Naomi, I called everyone I could think of to let them know she was fine but I still got a few calls.

It had the desired effect, Tony thought he has gotten away with it and surfaced near the motel, the police arrested him, filming was halted and Naomi come home. In the mean time, Eleanor had been offered a place at the national ballet, she really wanted to go but I wasn't sure, not after what had just happened. Eleanor relented and decided to go to Bible College instead, it was the summer and it could have been a lot worse. In amongst all of this Henry and I had formed a very close relationship, we had been dating for almost 3 years, it was nice to have someone to trust and it was great that the kids had a good role model. Over a very romantic dinner of tacos on the lounge room floor he asked the kids if he could marry me, they all said yes so he asked me! I said yes, I was going to be voted down any way. The kids all ran to tell my mum and dad, they also run down to tell John and Emma, and also to tell their cousins they were going to be in a wedding!

Epilogue

So a lot of years have passed, I am about to celebrate my 50th birthday, a lot has changed but I have never been happier.

I married Henry, I am now a pastor's wife, I am still working for the same law firm and I still love it.

Peter spent many years at university before eventually deciding to become a teacher; he bought an apartment in our building and teaches high school maths and science.

Eleanor went into fashion, she was a model for a while then a fitter, then eventually a designer, she and her partner Sara run a small boutique not far from home. They had a commitment ceremony but cannot legally marry yet. They are devoted to each other and love their family; they adopted twins from China, Chou and Kim and are building a design empire for their girls to one-day rule over.

Naomi is still acting; she has a string of movies to her name and has won many awards. She eventually met a lovely man, Bradley, he was a producer on one of her movies, eventually they got married and they have a daughter Daisy and a son, Tom. They bought a big house Texas; they plan to fill it with children and dogs.

John and Emma are still going strong, John is teaching gym at the local school and Emma is the manager at a local childcare centre. They are both very involved with the community.

Teresa is an elementary teacher, she married a lovely guy and they have 2 beautiful twin sons, Alexander and Maximilian.

Aiden followed me into law; he was made an associate and is working his way up. He married Jane but it all fell apart is a few years. He has a son, Jack who lives with him.

My older sister Vanessa died a few years ago, after she died her kids found the cards and letters we had sent to her. She had kept them, her children made contact with us and we are getting to know each other.

After everything that has gone before me, I am glad I have lived such an amazing life, I am proud of my family and of myself, I was given an amazing gift by god and I thank him every day for it!