

## The Warm Moment

A mad idea of your extraordinary lives  
as an extra gift of the ordinary, your lives remembered and replayed in poetry,  
for who you are, then and from your beginnings, the love of your Mother and I  
given to your independent spirits, wise and wild for breaking free of us.

How you were born – nine hard days and nights of hope and joy and pain and fear  
all the same night and day to me, not three children but one blur  
waiting and watching, working hard and long for you to arrive,  
and then the slippery rush, the joy, the exhaustion, the mess!

How you grew – finding your feet, losing your helplessness, learning to talk  
learning to tell jokes, being boss and bestie and little brother  
or all three, taking turns (or not) and learning why / why not  
the big and terrifying truths of dying, and pushing it away, accepting, forgetting.

How you went to school – all three in your own times under the same walnut tree  
on your first days, no tears, brave boys itching for bigger adventure,  
for your own bikes, or scooters, for ripsticks, or skates, or yo-yos, or kites or helicopters,  
for friends who came and went, who shared and broke and hurt and helped and all, all of it.

Our holidays together – Mylestom and Uki and Grassy Head, sunny beaches and sea,  
Gran and Grandad's, bumping your heads and snakes and frogs and Christmas  
Grandma and Poppy's, the long drives that you hated so much when we sang along  
to Play School and the Beatles, islands where you got sick and found sea monsters.

The eclipse that we almost didn't see! The times we were nearly killed!  
The regrets of the things we missed, or underrated, or hated, that we forgot,  
that we lived in slow days we could not count there were so many, when we wanted them  
to hurry up for the real days we knew would come when we did not suck so much!

How you grew, and kept growing, how you changed and were still who you are,  
how we loved you and could not tell you, how we hated that we could not be  
the best, most perfect, most darling Mother and Father but our worn out selves  
getting more worn, and harder, but slowly stronger, and seeing you grow, and grow.

Until now – and you say you don't remember – you can't find yourself – you don't know  
but we do – we do remember – it's like yesterday when you showed me your little lion  
and we knew that we would lose you, but we held you tight, and kept these things  
forever, forever, in the unbroken braid of humanity, where we remember you as children.

So say you remember *us* when we were young, before we had to yell to make you,  
when we told you stories and gave you rocket rides and ice cream for the first time,  
say you know and will remember for your own children, for the long years of the future  
when time is all, but is eternity, the gift of the warm moment when we love you so much.

When you were first born, in that first moment, you opened your eyes and looked at us with such alertness and personality you could have been any adult we were just meeting for the first time, but it lasted only a moment. You seemed to be wondering how we got in here, then you screwed up those eyes and wailed, and soon you fell asleep.

We brought you home from hospital, or just once we actually had you at home as planned. You were perfect, with your sweet round sleeping faces, your little hands and incredible fingers each with its own perfect tiny nail. Soon we had to trim those fingernails, as Michelangelo might have trimmed the nails of David but with more care. We washed you and dressed you and wiped your tiny perfect bottoms so I hope never again to see anything so perfect, not that that was the hardest thing we had to do.

The more of you we had the harder it got. At three of you, when we first had to buckle you all into your baby and child seats we knew we were in trouble. We were outnumbered by babies. We started to drown in poo. It became almost impossible to do any little thing, and only after many years did it get any easier. We changed, as parents must because we are always tired and always responsible, and the responsibility is never fully seen as it stretches decades ahead and we must learn something new, the hard way, every day.

But to begin with it wasn't hard. We practiced disciplined sleeping habits, a thing called controlled crying, and vied to be the first to see you smile. It was always Mum, who was generally up with you at the odd times of night when the sense of humour must first awaken. Your intent little faces, I imagine, must have cracked up suddenly, with the most natural and effortless grin when you realised how much you loved your Mum, her warm breast milk on your chin. Then burp, wipe up, back to bed.

It's true that you must crawl before you can walk, but before you can crawl you must roll over. This happened over a few days when you seemed to get the idea that you needed to, somehow, move off of your back and get a better view of stuff that you could hear happening behind you. You started by craning your head in all directions, then pushing with your legs to extend your periphery, then your arms (as you later learned they are called), then suddenly the whole room flipped over and you found yourself belly down on the floor with Mum cheering like you had just solved Fermat's last theorem.

It was quite a feat, and I wish I was there every time, but you know Mum and Dad always say hooray no matter what you do, so it must be no big deal. A few days later, those arms and legs really proved what they were there for, and you were off. Suddenly we had to put everything fragile out of reach, everything sharp or hard out of harm's way, every door to the outside carefully closed. On one of the few (but always memorable) occasions when we didn't, a very nice lady who owned a car came to our door to ask if that was our baby crawling across the road. It certainly was (Alex, in fact), oh my goodness.

We made paper hangings to cover your walls, all the letters and numbers, cutouts from books, to stimulate your baby minds, and began intently listening for your first words: Alexander: "Car".

Lewis: "No".

Zachary: "Hello" (we even got it on tape)

We made the mistake of giving Alex a dummy before you could even crawl, as it seemed to be a benign way to comfort you to sleep. It turned into a serious dependency or addiction that we started to fear would lead to the harder stuff, and we desperately tried to figure out how to take it away again. Finally you were four and we were moving to a new house and there was a lot of stuff still coming in the next trip, and we told you your dummy was still in one of the boxes. Every time you asked we told you we hadn't found it yet. Eventually you forgot about it. Your later counselling at eighteen might have found it again, or the fossilised remnants of it in your mind's geology.

But I don't think it effected your intelligence at all. You were very smart kids. Alex read the entire two-volume encyclopaedia we got you from kindy, finished it by age five or six. You may not remember now that you knew everything then. Zac was playing verbal tricks on us before you could talk, like the time Poppy pulled out his old "Are you a lucky duck?" lame joke and Zachary, a babe in his high chair, came in with the punchline as best you could make it, "gack gack" meaning yes I'm a lucky duck and I can go quack quack. It surprised us so much we all cracked up, Zac especially. You know now not to laugh at your own jokes, which is so cool. But Smart is a sense of humour, or seeing the subtle flip-side. Lewis could see the hidden clues in any puzzle, you could take any two pieces of random junk and screw them together to make a great toy, then juggle it with two other things or balance it impossibly on one edge.

Oh the books that we read! Bedtime soporifics for the best of yawners, awe-inspiring legends of myth that led us by hand to our own dream adventures. We read every single book ever written only to find that there are millions more, not counting the ones we didn't read. We read every single Dr Seuss except somehow we missed Yurtle the Turtle, so the Duval production of Dr Seuss Junior was completely new! We read *The Diggingest Dog*, *Are You My Mother*, *The Bears'* books, the whole little-hardback world. I told you the story of the Hobbit and the legends of the undying lands in Tolkien's mythology. Why did I never read you *The Lord of the Rings*? I loved *The Giant Under The Snow* a dreamlike horror-magic story. *The Phantom Tollbooth* a ripping yarn of learning and companionship.

The games we played! Roundabouts and Lego Hogwarts, Monopoly and Starfarers. I spun you head over heels in Blues Clues Skidoo and sent you by Treasure Map deep into our Pirate House. Alex at 3 re-invented Go as a kind of Klondike gold-hunting game; once you got the idea you came up with all the new rules, then you seemed to file it away as something you knew you could do. We made a Star Wars game out of little spacecraft fighter tiles, struggling only with the attention span bits. We made games about mythical journeys in search of the source of infesting monsters, "Good Friends" the players must be, even the Evil One whose orcs filled the underworld and whose name was most imaginatively *Quorrel*. We turned a chess set and some big ball bearings into a gripping target practice game on the kitchen floor. Then in the red dusk, viewing the ruin and wreckage of the back yard, we invented GARDEN FURNITURE WARS to bring those broken tonka trucks back to life and push the soft toys back into the safety of the house.

Your toys! OMG. Where do we start? There were always toys, from the earliest swinging hangers, the best of which was a flying cow I bought in NYC before we could get them here.

In the same trip I got you a farm animal voice box that you hated because something seemed to be trapped inside it, plus a few classic cars that lasted for years, and the first of your soft toys, Lewis' little dog called Lassie. I have always loved and respected your soft toys. Your toys had personalities, there's no question about it. Your first ever toy, that we still have, was a gift from an old friend of mine, the Mr Potato-Head with Darth Vader parts. He arrived a few days after Alex was born, and though years later he survived the loss of one arm, with radical amputee surgery and a new bionicle arm part he is still quizzically saluting the day even now. You normally wouldn't let me mess with the Lego but I insisted on this simple procedure with life-saving results.

Lego! You had so much Lego. The first set we ever had was a Robots set, dozens of great little droids and mech warrior designs with jointed parts that we used in everything else for years when that original set was long gone. We had most of the *Mars Explorer* sets, the mining drill mech, the bubble-domed rovers, the weird black-lacquer alien fighters, and a great Mars base that had a complete laboratory for doing experiments on aliens *and* a huge needle-sharp space shuttle with all sorts of interesting opening and moving parts.

We had Lego submarines and airplanes with airports and boats and trucks and houses. We had Lego ninjas, Lego *Star Wars*, Lego space bandits, Lego dinosaur hunters, Lego Harry Potter characters, Lego collector sets from sax players to red indians to life savers to gladiators. We had the complete Batman world, the bat cave, bat boat, two bat cars, the bat copter, all the villains and all their stuff plus henchmen and banks to rob, Bruce Wayne changing costume as he came down the elevator, Robin in red, Batman in black or blue or ice-station white. We made Lego videos and Lego dioramas. We had Lego computer games, board games, flashlights. We won first prize in the show for a Lego Martian Canyon. We saw the Lego movie and knew almost every piece.

But over time the Lego accumulated into a great shifting mass that became the confining logistic problem of our daily lives. We had it in purpose-made bags and old suitcases, sorted into plastic containers and spread over the disused parts of the verandah or living room. There was Lego in every room, all over every floor, under every piece of furniture, in thick drifts in the long grass next to the house. But you loved it and love it still, even though it bores you now. It taught you to follow instructions, to build complex things from simple parts, and it taught you the anarchy-chaos of natural decomposition into parts that all things must eventually undergo.

My heart is still with your toys, so let me try to recapture them. Alex asked for a train for his second birthday, so we got you one that was bright red yellow and blue, with forward and reverse on a track with interesting loops and points, stations and buffers, three or four little cars and a battery powered steam engine that worked well for years. Aunti Anni gave you all a little work train and mining rig machine that worked like manic clockwork but slowly over the years ceased to connect up. Zac got a Hotcars™ loop-the-loop powered track with death-defying cobra snake head and *two* hot cars. Lewis got a remote controlled racing car, red, with a cool steering wheel and gears, speeding up to about 30 kph, great on a skate park with jumps and big banks. We collected car sets for a few years, with incredible loops, twists and chicanes. I still have the best bits in my physics teaching tools. Cars and trains can teach you a lot about physics, I knew that, I'm glad you got it.

Then there's the big, physical toys, the swings and slides, the pedal cars and roundabouts. I rigged up the washing line with baby seats, carried on my head the boards I needed to build you a slippery slide, learned the hard way the precision science of a swing that doesn't wobble. As you said in one of your first long sentences, oscillating smoothly back and forth, "Swings are the best things for making us happy!". We made a cubby house in an apple tree, a club house in a gum tree, a viney fortress against the back fence with a real window and skylight and slots for shooting nerf guns in mock battles. We had pedal cars and wagons and go-carts that we rode like cavalry down the hill from the lookout. We found, and lost again, the bikes and scooters and ripsticks that surfed the concrete swells and turbulence of the skatepark and footpath, that carried you on and on with me and Mum trailing ever farther behind.

Speaking of nerf guns, we had pretty much the whole range before they became completely over-the-top chunky-firepower ridiculous, and you "modified" them from instruction videos on the Internet that would sometimes make them work better, or more usually make them stop working altogether. Modifying nerf guns became the craze that really was crazy. The technical arguments were obscure, the foam-plastic-hot-glue materials and engineering sadly insufficient to the science. I tried to explain to you the high-speed physics of gas compression and springs, the ballistics of projectile motion, the structural theory of elasticity, but you knew only your own ideas and broke so much good plastic that nothing worked anymore and I stopped buying the damned things.

I may spend several years in hell for all the plastic I threw away, but we didn't throw away the Lego, we carefully repackaged it and sold or gave it away. I say that in honour and with great respect.

The grand theme of the *Toy Story* movies is mortality, the fear of being lost or thrown away or broken. You confronted these terrifying truths while still very young, realising they apply also to people, children even in your tenderest years. This was hard, but I learned something from you, that the most reassuring thought, better than heaven or reincarnation, is that it will be a long, long time, an unimaginably long time until the curtain falls. It's so far off it's as if it will never happen. I explained to you that I myself had lived for so long that I couldn't even remember just being three years old, it was like forever, and even now (then) I was still young. Alex clutched that idea like a straw, so much so that I worried about the depth of your fear. Lewis was calmer but still mightily awed, and Zac was able to explain it back to me and say that you weren't worried anymore. It never seemed to bother any of you after that, at least you never talked about it again. But you all talked about it at least once, well before I ever thought you would.

As it happened, by the time you were seven-nine-eleven you'd "died" dozens of times anyway, and me too unless I got you first. Spitfires were particularly fatal, and mechs, or racing cars, or being outnumbered by enemy tanks. Headshots were a popular high-scoring endgame. We fell down cavernous holes, burned up in the atmosphere, got eaten or squashed or poisoned. Light-sabre fighting only became more real, and the more you died the better you got. Nerf wars were particularly terrifying, and frustrating as the mods blew up or their performance didn't improve. Alex eventually got over his mysterious fear of air-

raid sirens, which fortunately don't come up often in modern games. As you got older the games also got better and more real, until finally I couldn't keep up anymore and had to walk away. You won fair and square. I didn't let you win, and I didn't die, I lived to tell this tale.

But I have to ask, from the experience of all that we gave you, did you learn generosity, did you learn to give or to accept a gift gladly and unconditionally? Do you really understand Christmas and birthdays, did we show it to you right? This would be the grand theme of our own family *Toy Story*, but we haven't worked through it yet and I just don't know. Were we too generous? Did we know what you wanted, or even how to give it? What else did we give you with the materialism and plastic spoon-fed me-ism of the world we tried to change? Did we bring you with us into a new world or did we make you part of the same old problem?

Then there are the things that you lost, or broke, or had stolen. Lewis lost a fiver in the floods one time. Zac's skull-knife snapped, and even though I fixed it he knew it wasn't the same. Alex had a great little batmobile but he fell over and scratched it. Too many times to tell; tears, and me trying to help, trying to be the World Bank of Repair and Relief for all and sundry, though broke myself as I often was.

At some point, each of us went to school. Hobbit, the legendary Armidale pre-school, was your beginning, and Mum was there in the office and also in the parenting centre in town and mothers groups and families where she met the mums whose kids became most of your friends and whose other-halves became many of my friends. You were very good at educational computer games, Reader Rabbit and Blues Clues, you sang and counted turtles and cooked beautiful word soup.

Ben Venue, one of the best primary schools you'll ever find, was your second home and the foundation of all your sports and arts, and again Mum was there in the clothing pool, keeping us involved in the Easter Hat parade and Book Fair and always bringing new people into our lives. Remembering your three careers through that fine school is your job, not mine, and Mum is a better authority on what you might not remember, you just have to ask her.

Then Duval, your high school, except for Lewis who rebelled against the ever-present older brother and "dickheads" he'd known all his life and chose his own school. Mum was at Duval too, in the canteen, and she never agreed to your move to AHS or let me forget it. Was it a mistake? Was it your decision to make, mistaken or otherwise? Should I have managed it as a democratic process, or denied your right to make your own decision, or spent months trying to calculate your unknowable future outcomes at two alternative schools?

Having only two (or even in Lewis' case, three) major changes of school, you had stability and continuity of your friendships, and you had the ongoing support of some of the best teachers of gymnastics, music and drama in the country. Alex came 14<sup>th</sup> in state gymnastics one year. Lewis played soccer for about eight years and you were damn fast, unbeatable at your peak. Zac, you worked your way up to Brown belt in Tae Kwan Do and are clearly not to be messed with. The Force is strong in all of you, you can levitate a basketball and float like

a balloon on a trampoline. You can juggle knives and balance 50c coins in end-on-end stacks like Pitt Street sculptures.

But for all your energy and physicality, through most of this you had a father who nearly died of a medical condition they'd only found a cure for a few years before and who became bloated and ugly with medication when his kids were trying to grow tall and healthy. I sometimes feel it's my fault that you did not become the beautiful athletic young man your early trajectories seemed to point towards, because I was never very athletic, and after I got sick I could not take you there. I'm sorry for all of that. There was so much I could not do, or prevent from happening.

Accident is important, in life as in art, especially in childhood. Alex broke his arm at the start of the school holidays (of course). Zac fell off a swing and still has a cool scar on the back of his head. Lewis had some accidents that were just incredible, fish-hooks through toes, exploding thumbs, staying cool and in control on your clever feet while falling down a rocky cliff. As a toddler you raced us out onto a jetty, and in the moment I wasn't looking you jumped into the water and disappeared. It took me another second to figure out where you were and jump in after you. For each of you there is at least one such specific moment when I looked around and realised you were drowning, and I'm glad I was always there but I don't feel heroic.

Quite the opposite, I feel like a fool. The responsibility of playing an essential and repeated role in childhood accident is much harder even than it sounds. But I must be a sensitive soul, because I think I came off with the most scars. I almost fainted in the surgery at the exploding thumb incident, the "responsible" adult trying to distract you with a soft toy, only to see your pain, the needle and stitches and blood. How common is it for fathers to develop post-traumatic stress symptoms even when their children survive unscathed? Some memories are a nightmare I can't shake, and they literally hurt, I'm there all over again but I can't see properly or move fast enough.

I know you don't blame me or even have much memory of these things and I know it's no big deal. Maybe I'm trying to forgive myself, or writing these events down so I can forget them. But this is not therapy, it's just as I said, so you know what happened when you try to remember. There are some things that I really don't want to remember – near-death accidents, public meltdowns, my own anger and frustration – but these are the times that tend to stick in your head and spoil your thoughts of the many happy times, so let's look at them clearly and keep them separate. You hated the long drives, the sound of us "grown-ups" incessantly arguing, the sense of loss when things were broken or stolen or fell out of your pocket. You had friends and lost them, made dumb mistakes and got in big trouble, suffered in the shrinking trap of a family all too close, smelly and weird. You had storms of emotion that blew you into bleak southern oceans far from help, and despite the dark and cold down there you didn't want to be rescued. You punched walls and stole from us. You wiped out badly and hurt everyone around you. We forgave you and saw it in ourselves, tried to be better people, became just passable adults only a dozen or so steps behind your need for us to be perfect.

We're sorry for our mistakes. You don't have to be, you were children and we don't hold anything against you.

For children, you certainly had independence, and wow how you travelled. Alex rediscovered an old friend in Canada and saved up from your first job to fly over there, alone, at sixteen. You were terrified, or so excited you didn't sleep for a day and a half. We think Lewis changed schools, ostensibly, to get the chance at fifteen to travel to Japan with the language class. You were mortified to learn that they expected you to not only speak, but sing, in Japanese! Zac met up with his cousin at a party and within two weeks was choofing off to Melbourne, by yourself, at fourteen. You're the only one who didn't pay for most of your trip, but that's OK, interstate trains aren't expensive and it was all about family, which is important. What you and William got up to is none of our business.

And we travelled together as a family so many times, to so many places. Ho! for the wave pool at Grassy Head, the flying fox at Tannum Sands, the climbing figs of Bowen. Fish and chips at Brunswick Heads, Starbucks and sushi in Sydney. We climbed Mount Warning, walked the Pilliga caves, swam in volcanic lakes and wanted to climb giant figs in the Atherton tablelands. We saw the 2012 Cairns eclipse! We saw solar flares through a daylight telescope at Sydney observatory. We had Fancy hotel rooms, holiday houses like the round tree-house in the Pilliga pottery, the arch house at Brunswick Heads, and the campervan, tents, cabins. We rode the wild rides and waterslides of the Gold Coast Worlds and even better, the off-beat contraptions and two-headed calf oddities of Green Valley Farm. We went float-racing our picnic plates down the rapids of the Gwydir, swam in the freezing cold waters of Copeton dam and scrambled in droughty awe on the strange dead stump landscape of the shoreline. We walked by night the long way around the brightly lit highways of Sydney airport, just to find the harbour and a view of the city the night before Alex flew out, to help him with his nerves I think.

We had holidays in small groups too, in all combinations. Mum and Alex went to Uki one time, while Lewis and Zac and I had a big bike ride and discovered the UNE colleges and the rock climbing cliff. When Alex went to Canada, Lewis and Zac went skating at an ice-rink and toured the shops for comics, memorabilia, games. We all saw the QVB toy store at various different times. Alex saw the inside of a submarine, Lewis and Zac did the Melbourne parkour thing. When Alex was only a toddler you went with me by train to see the Botanic Gardens and Opera house, a brave little traveller, even when you were very tired you wanted to see what was over the next grassy hill and behind those buildings. I remember times I spent with each of you – swimming with Lewis on a warm day at blue hole, the boulders and rough waterslides under our bums – going to the park with Zac and a paintbox, painting a little picture that we still have – parking somewhere with Alex and the feeling of your hand as you told me so bravely how you really felt. Mum too, will tell you her stories.

This is getting complicated; ordinary day-to-day life starts to mix with holiday and at times brings school with it. Lewis and I had an insanely funny conversation in Sydney eating chicken and chips before wandering over to see Ben Venue at the opera house, still rapping hilariously, and I couldn't see Zac in the group on stage but Lewis did. Another time Alex, Zac and I saw Lewis at the House (I gave you a semaphore “L” at intermission so you could see us), and before that Alex went on his own with the school as well as finding his own way to

visit his old band mates from “The Window” somewhere in the mountains. You’ve done Sydney Town Hall, the YMCA, the Gymnastics halls at the Sydney olympics centre and Newcastle. We stayed in a “Formule One” room like a bunk cupboard, which was fun in a creepy way. You stayed with cousins and friends, schoolmates and families who spoke another language. You ate Teppenyaki and hot dogs and pie floaters maybe, I don't know, I wasn't always there.

Family and friends, just non-stop, the whole time. We lived in a perpetual Andy Warhol open house, in a neighbourhood of great friends that just got bigger when you started to learn your way around town. You all had early girlfriends, or friends who were girls, some who later became boys, and a kaleidoscope of shifting alliances and breakups between all of you, boys and girls, at all ages. We (Mum and I) still don't know exactly what happened with many of these early relationships, but we saw your hurt and know what happened to ourselves at that age. But your friends were either here every day or you were there the next, and all of you were either out or in with up to 20 kids, usually around 5-10, especially the nights of our neighbourhood progressive dinners. Grandma and Poppy saw much of this happening from their wagon-wheels caravan in the backyard and I’m not sure they understood that this was all our own family. Gran and Grandad remained good friends and became somehow double-people, disreputable types of our most immense elder respect, still kids yet always the most grown up of all of us.

We had almost reached critical mass by the time Alex brought Ruby home, and we renovated into only just enough rooms to sleep all our heads. One problem seemed to solve into the next, and we found we really needed those friends, we really had to love one another. Living in the hallway as much as in the kitchen, all of you, the whole wide and intersecting circle, gradually came into closer and if not constant contact via the net, and by the same technological marvel some of those lost were found again! It seems the secret of a friendship breakup can be stored in a cool dry place. Fortunately these more distant friends did not take up any space.

Parties! How many parties did we have? Uncountable millions, with all our family and friends at least once a year and for dozens of other occasions as well. Birthday cakes of all kinds and times, candled choo-choo trains and Club Penguins and pirate ships. The progressive dinners of so many courses and all the kids playing in trees and trampolines at everyone else’s house. Halloween parties on the street, Zac a headless with a raw red neck wound, Alex a home-made stormtrooper, Lewis as himself in a blue Hawaian. Then all three of you as hanged men and ghouls. Later even more reasons to be sick...

I have finally got to what I really wanted to write about, the times when we were all there and it was great, the best times. I'll keep adding these now as I go. I could riff on this for years I think, so look back again in the later drafts when I'm gone. Just kidding! I'm not going anywhere, I'll be around and working and traveling with your Mum mostly but you're welcome to come along for the ride anytime. One day again when you're adults we'll hire a holiday place, like our parents still do with us. It ain't over, ever!

Before Ruby came along (and I want most to share this with her so she remembers it too) our best ever camping holidays were at Grassy Head, long weeks and warm days of sea and

sand, learning to surf, riding the waves in a rubber boat, swimming and skin-diving and rock-climbing. Sometimes just us, often with neighbours and friends, staying in campervans and tents, playing cards and drawing in books and making paper models. Eating big breakfasts on a long table with all the neighbourhood kids and our friends the Mains, the Branagans, Helen and Macca, Yani and Tobias and Eli and Eva, Bonny and Alison and Jess (who changed her name for a long time around then), Francesca and Ronan, and all the rest.

The long walks as big groups on the beach and rocks, the whales some of you saw! The fish I started figuring out how to catch! Grassy Head caravan park was paradise, even in a year of gentle rain when we woke up to find ourselves in a large puddle spreading over our site. We didn't mind, even when we moved and a few nights later I woke again to find the floor of the campervan saturated from ceiling drips. We were so tough, all that resilience training at Ben Venue paid off. Same again the next year when a bushfire went through the back of the park and blackened the whole headland. You weren't scared, you were enthralled.

But then one year the foul weather came, and washed away the old sandy banks you knew, and the year after that the wind blew us to smithereens. We never seemed to recover the same holiday spirit after that. We limped home exhausted and struggled for a long time to find our peace. This is a big part of our story and in retrospect, it's almost all perfect, but it was lost. It is our dreaming.....