

2007/8.

Remember

My grade 2 teacher pinned a little piece of paper on the girl's cardigan that said, 'Don't touch me, I'm dirty'. Then the teacher gave me the soap and asked me to hand it to the girl so she could wash her mouth out with it. I refused. The girl had sworn I think. She was eight. That teacher was a monster. I remember this scene like I wrote it myself. Perhaps I did.

First day of kindergarten and when my mother turned to walk away across the park I climbed the fence and screamed after her. I strained my arm through the hole in the wire fence and begged her to come back. She did, she didn't. I can smell the tanbark as I write this.

I sit in a huddle at the window and wait for my father to drive up in his car to pick me up for a day, a night, a weekend. I refuse to talk to my mother as I wait. It's as if the talking might break the spell, the waiting-for-daddy-spell. My absent father was my first love. My first disappointment. Maybe he was or maybe this is just a crude psychoanalytic reading of something simple. A child simply waiting for her father whom she sees once a week.

What will our children remember?

When my mother suggested I call the man she was living with, daddy I refused and ran out of the house. The man had wanted it. I hated the idea. I can still remember the sting. When my mother signed the 'Sorry Elly is late for school note' with another surname that wasn't mine, I tore off the bottom bit and presented it to the teacher. The teacher must have told my mother because my mum cried and said she was sorry and I never called that other man anything sacred again.

When my stepfather had a heart attack I was taken out of school and when I saw him being carried out of our house on a stretcher I laughed. I was nervous so I laughed. My mother has never forgotten this. I had.

I worry like most parents about what my child will remember. You know that joke about all the therapy that they are going to have to have later in life? I want him to remember the good things! All the good things we and his friends and his grandmother do together. What if he just

remembers the bad things? Like yesterday when I told him he was driving me insane and to go away and leave me alone? Or that time when he saw me crying and he said, 'Don't cry again Mumma, it's OK, it's OK'.

I watched Zig and Zag on the portable black and white and my mother fell over. Then there were strangers and an ambulance. I got as close to the television as I could, as if it's light and gentle hum might provide comfort.

When the people over the road, the mother, asked me how long I was going to be living next to them I announced that I would stay until I got married. I lived in more than 20 houses before I left home at 18. That mother was just fishing. She knew there was some colorful stuff going on at our place. I was a child how would I know how long anything was going to last?

When my father didn't come to Xmas lunch one year and everyone was talking very quietly I knew something bad must have happened. My uncle told me my father's wife had died. She died on Xmas day. I didn't eat anything. When I saw my father again I didn't speak to him.

Someone in my family had shock therapy. It was very out of mode for a while but now it's used again for severely depressed people. They don't really know how it works but they know it makes people forget things. Forget the good and the bad. It can make some people feel OK about living again without the memories. Now they can invent new memories. Ones that don't hurt so much.

The girl over the road was adopted and she had a hole in her heart. I imagined a heart shaped thing inside her with a hole clear through the middle. Like a fancy chocolate. She used to nibble at the cement between the bricks of her back fence. I did it with her once but didn't like it although I pretended to. I thought she did it because of the hole in her heart. Mum told me she died a few years later and that she wasn't really adopted. Why would someone want to make that up?

So much therapy is about delving into memories, archeologising your life. Sometimes it's hard to differentiate between real and imagined memories. Sometimes people can convince themselves that something happened when it didn't. What's the difference? I think that sometimes this kind of therapy is useless.

My grandmother put my hair in rags. I was Bo Peep the next day at school. My mother was making her laugh and we were watching Johnnie Farnham singing Sadie the Cleaning lady with the mop and everything. I kissed the television. My grandmother said she though he was a 'lovely boy'. I had long dark tight ringlets for days.

People say we worry too much about our children these days. That we are too concerned that they are being adequately stimulated and given enough positive messages. But I know people who were given everything when they were growing up and feel now they are nothing. And I know others who were reared amidst such struggle and emotional deprivation and they are happy now. Well adjusted. You just can't know how people are going to turn out. But you still worry that when your son heard that argument between you and your ex that he will remember it somehow - internalize that single moment for all time.

I woke up and it was still dark and I was in a little bed at my father's house and when I opened my eyes there was just enough light coming through the window to show me his face all still and smiling at me. I smiled back and went to sleep again.

I lost a lot of my hair when I was seven. The doctor said it was stress. I stopped going swimming and doing sport with the school and once when I was hanging upside on the monkey bar someone started screaming that I was bald. When it all grew back eventually after injections and tablets and the forgetting, I swam everyday.

When my baby sister was born - I was allowed to hold her if I sat down on the couch - she had lots of thick gold curls. I was jealous of her hair but thought she was so beautiful.

We rode our bikes and played outside near the creek in an inner suburb till the street lamps would come on and we knew it was time to go home for dinner. If I fell over and

it wasn't so bad I waited till the very end of the day to tell my mother about it. Sometimes I forgot to tell her and remembered the next day when I discovered the wound.

They made pizza and sugo in the kitchen out the back and I helped. There was a little gate at our back fence, which led to our friend's house, and I was there nearly every day. I saw a chook get its head cut off and run around the back yard without it, at that house.

My son and I laugh and make up different voices and he pretends he is a robot chasing me and I am the bad goblin. Then if he let's me I get to be the naughty princess who hates everything but then becomes good because she is sick of being bad. He tells me he will always love me and still loves me even though he sometimes gets angry with me because he has heard me say this to him. He tells me about kinder that only happened yesterday and says, 'Do you remember Mumma, do you remember William didn't share and then he did and then you came to pick me up. Do you remember that?'