

THE CULT EFFECT



CARLI MCCONKEY

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**A True Story of
Mind Control in Australia
1996 - 2010**

Carli McConkey

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This book is dedicated to my three beautiful children, Sebastian, Jacob and Hamish, and to my parents, John and Robyn, who have provided unfailing love and support throughout our cult experience and subsequent recovery.

I also dedicate this book to the millions of people around the world who have been, or who are currently, caught up in similar circumstances and are experiencing pain and heartbreak from being oppressed and separated from their loved ones.

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INTRODUCTION

Most people do not believe that mind control exists. However, from the time a child is born we are controlling what that child thinks. From the environment they grow up in, to the views and beliefs a parent instils in a child, the mind of that child is being moulded. The child can begin to form their own beliefs, make their own decisions, and carry out their own actions, but the parent, teacher or passer-by will often influence the child on whether to repeat, change, or revert to their original belief, decision, or action.

Similarly, these principles can be applied to an idealistic and trusting teenager or adult, by someone in authority, such as a spiritual leader, priest, personal development coach, doctor, healer, psychologist, or counsellor, political or military figure, senior businessperson, or partner. A charismatic leader can lure followers at their most vulnerable stage in life. This could be during the transition of leaving home, school or university, post-divorce, whilst suffering from a physical or mental illness, or after a loved one has passed away. Before long, these victims believe and trust the leader more than the faculties of their own brain, which would normally enable them to make logical decisions, sense danger and know when someone is lying or manipulating them to their detriment.

In this book, I aim to provide a greater understanding of the process of mind control to help educate family and friends of current or ex-cult members so that they are better equipped to support their loved ones in recovery. I would also like to

share my experience with fellow ex-cult members and help prevent others falling prey to such predators.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is a factual account, based on the author's thoughts, observations, opinions, and experience of people and events that occurred in a high-control group, as well as during the continued traumatic period of recovery after escape.

It should be noted that when under these extreme conditions, human nature is such that people react and perceive things differently to what they would under normal circumstances.

In addition, throughout this book, particular terms are used which are specific to the author's cult. Cults, by definition, have a language all of their own. A Glossary has been included to help explain the meaning of these terms.

Please note, most names have been changed to protect identity.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

Mark Twain

PART 1

PROLOGUE

‘I want to go back and get my whipper snipper, Mick. I know they want to kill me, but I can walk up the back road tonight, with no sound, no lights and I can grab it. I paid over a thousand dollars for that machine!’

‘No. It’s too dangerous.’

‘I know they’ll probably ambush me or something, but I just don’t want them to keep anything else that we paid for.’

‘No.’

‘We need to go to the house in the middle of the night to collect our stuff.’

‘No, we don’t. We’ll go during the day. It will be fine.’

‘No, it *won’t*, Mick! We need to go just before midnight when Kate will be up at the office and we can be done by the time she gets home in the morning.’

‘Look, I’ve got a friend who’s going to help us move. Surely, they’re not going to do anything when there’s a complete stranger with us? He’s free on Sunday, we’ll go at around ten, and we’ll be done before they even find out.’

~

‘Shit, Mick, the locks have been changed.’

‘What? You’re joking?’

‘No, the key is not working.’

‘I’m going to find a way in... Here, I’ll climb through the bathroom window... Ouch!’

‘Are you ok?’

‘Yes. Let’s get moving.’

~

‘What are you doing? You’re trespassing!’

‘Come on Ben, we’re here to get Carli’s stuff.’

‘You’re trespassing. You have no right to be on this property; get off immediately!’

‘What are you going to do about it, Ben?’

‘Natasha said you have to get off now, otherwise we’re going to call the police.’

‘Ignore him, Carli, just keep going.’

~

Ben held the phone up to Michael’s ear. Natasha was screaming: ‘Carli is a *liar*, Mick – Don’t you know Carli *owes a lot of people a lot of money?* – Carli is *manipulating* you Mick, she is scrambling for *money!*’

As a group of three continued to watch and make threats, we filled the truck up with as much as we could, leaving some furniture, clothes, cherished personal items, books, toys and anything else we had no time, nor state of mind to collect. As we left the property, I implored Michael to understand that I was too scared to return for the rest of our belongings. He assured me that he would go back another day without me.

‘I’m not scared of them,’ he said.

A week later, Isabelle texted Michael to make arrangements for us to remove the rest of our things, clean the house and mow the lawn.

How dare they! I thought.

‘We’re not going back,’ I told Michael. ‘Let’s just leave

the rest of the stuff behind.'

~

'Is that "Carli McConkey"?''

'Yes.'

'Are you driving the car with number plate AO 34 89?'

'Yes.'

'That car has been reported as stolen by a Dominic Williams. You will need to return it immediately to its rightful owner, which we can see is registered under Mr Williams.'

'But I was given that car!' I exclaimed to the policeman at the other end of the phone.

'I'm afraid, Ms McConkey, you have to return the car to Arcadia Guesthouse at Byron Bay within the next 24 hours.' As an afterthought, he added: 'It's not worth the trouble, luv. Just return the car and get on with your lives.'

Growing Up

I WAS BORN in Sydney in 1974 to two loving parents, John, and Robyn, who at the time were in their early thirties. When I was almost three, my little brother came along. We lived in Drummoyne, in Sydney's inner west. I don't remember a lot from my childhood. I suppose the few things I do remember are probably those that most influenced and shaped my life. My mother was a nurse, my father the Export Manager at a grocery and pharmaceutical company. When I was five my father took an overseas placement in Lae, Papua New Guinea. This was a mixed experience. I remember running around with deeply tanned skin, barefoot much of the time and playing hide-and-seek with my brother. Our house seemed to have a never-ending number of cupboards and hidey-holes. I attended an International school. When it was raining at lunchtimes, which happened often, I would play Mastermind in the school library. I remember visiting the local markets, where there was an abundance of tropical fruit and vegetables. The male villagers would be chewing tobacco, smiling up at us with their yellow teeth; the women would be weaving baskets, and selling colourful beaded jewellery.

When I was around six or seven years old, my parents took us out to dinner at the local Golf Club. I was among a

group of children running around downstairs playing, when I was approached by a young, indigenous teenager, who grabbed me and thrust his fingers deep inside me. He was in the process of literally kidnapping me, when one of the mothers who was on watch saw him and demanded that he put me down. He did and proceeded to run off. Despite some initial searching by local police, he was never found. Although dismissed at the time by my parents as minor compared to what other potential consequences could have happened in the increasingly volatile country, this incident had a far-reaching impact on my life. Throughout my childhood into adulthood, I felt something *down there, inside me*, and I had a deeply ingrained fear of men. I also know that I retained the trauma of *Impending Doom*. One night, when we were back in Sydney permanently, after I'd turned eight, I asked my parents at the dinner table to confirm my recollection of the event. I asked, 'did that *actually* happen?'

They both replied 'yes'.

It was never spoken of again.

Whilst living overseas, my parents bought a holiday apartment in Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast, Queensland. It was a two-bedroom unit, one block from the beach. We would visit there during our holidays back to Australia and continued to do so every Christmas until I was fifteen. One night, when I was around seven years old, I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't find my parents. They weren't in their beds; my brother wasn't in his, either. I sat on the couch in the quiet and the dark and waited, but they didn't come back. I thought they had abandoned me. I sat there for what felt like hours, horrible thoughts racing through my

head. *My parents don't love me. They've left me. There must be something wrong with me!* Eventually I must have fallen asleep, and in the morning, I discovered my parents had been next door having drinks with the neighbours.

When we permanently returned to Sydney, I was eight years old, and I commenced school in the middle of Year 2. A few weeks later, the school offered for me to go into Year 3, as academically I was ahead (probably due to the high level of education standard in the International School in PNG). I had already made some friends, so I asked my parents if I could stay where I was. As I played with my new-found friends, I was acutely aware that I had arrived partway through their school cycle: I felt very shy, and as if I didn't quite fit in. The boys in our class left at the end of Year 4, so we were without them in Years 5 and 6. I then attended an all-girls high school: so essentially, I did not interact with males – except my brother – for the next eight years. I was a quiet little girl, mostly reading in my bedroom on weekends, enjoying Elvis Presley movies on a Saturday and watching reruns of *Wonder Woman* on a Sunday.

During the first few years of high school, at the end-of-year awards presentations, I received academic awards for being first in four or five subjects. My parents were surprised by my success and so was I. More than anything, I wanted my parents to be proud of me. I would strive hard to complete my assignments perfectly, hoping to achieve top marks in every subject. One Sunday, we were visiting my parents' friends for lunch. I had been sitting on the grass in the backyard, earnestly completing an assignment in a project book. I'd drawn pictures, coloured in precisely with great effort. Once the

project was finished, my mum came over from chatting with her friends to take a look. She was so proud of my work and wanted to show everyone. She started walking over to her friends. A large swimming pool lay between us and them, and she had to navigate her way around it. This, however, proved difficult with a glass of red wine in one hand and my project in the other: she wobbled over, splashing straight into the water with my assignment in hand.

‘I’m so sorry, my darling!’ she cried. ‘Your project is ruined!’

Ignoring the fanfare and profuse apologies, I simply picked up an empty project book I had brought with me and re-commenced the assignment. I made no sound, gave no expression; I just took a deep breath and started from scratch. This was how I coped with things: I remained calm, and just got on with it. Looking back, there should have been some alarm bells ringing about my behaviour. Throwing a tantrum or expressing my emotions was just not something I did.

At the end of Year 9, I received a Christmas card from a friend in class who wrote ‘if you beat me in Maths or Science again next year, I will kill you!’ These words came as quite a shock and the following year I received only one award, for first in Maths. I felt like a complete failure. *What went wrong?* I churned over the events of the past year in my mind. *I mustn’t really be smart*, I thought. *Before, it must have been luck, or the teachers liked me, or no one else was trying until now.* Throughout Years 11 and 12, I was so anxious about my HSC results that I went to the gym four or five times a week to relieve my stress and rarely studied. This same friend said to me: ‘I know you’re not studying, but you’ll get high results

anyway and it won't be fair!' I appreciated her faith in me, despite her negative comments. I was terrified when I opened the envelope from the NSW Department of Education as I sat in my mum's car alone at the end of Year 12. The marks weren't what I would have liked, that is, not in the '90s', but I was relieved to be accepted into my chosen university degree, which was all I really needed.

Studying Communication at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, I was excited to be learning about current affairs, politics, and the foundation skills of journalism. My dad had always berated me for not knowing, for example, who the Deputy Prime Minister was, and this was my chance to educate myself about what really mattered in the world. I was around boys for the first time in years and I was like a little child in a candy shop! I was delighted to make friends easily in my self-contained student housing complex, The Diggings. I threw myself into the clubs and committees and in my second and third year achieved distinctions in some of my subjects. Academically, I began to realise *I might be smart after all*.

Growing up, I had been Catholic, in a family where my mother no longer practised, and my father called himself an Atheist. Despite my father's non-belief, he sent me off to church every Sunday... by myself. I learnt about Jesus, God, and most of the stories from the Old and New Testaments. I remember – while I was still quite young – sitting in mass each week, feeling extremely anxious that they may have changed the mass somehow during the week, and I might say or do something wrong. But each week it was exactly the same and each week I would soak up the fear that the priests

administered to our congregation. I strove to be loyal to God, like all those attending Church beside me.

When I was sixteen, I joined Antioch, the Catholic Church's youth group. I enjoyed attending our sessions each Sunday evening, where a parent couple would host a group of around fifteen teenagers. I had been extremely shy up to this point, turning beetroot whenever anyone focused on me. Antioch forced me to come out of my shell and make new friends. I realised I was actually *funny* and could make people laugh! Every few months, each of us would have to give a talk on our interpretation of the gospel and relate it back to our own lives. I enjoyed this public speaking, and after I'd given a few speeches, I was asked on occasion to give the homily in the pulpit at Sunday mass in our very friendly, community-minded church at Hunters Hill. I was very spiritual, and I planned to do a theology course at some stage later in life.

When I moved to Bathurst for university, however, I visited the local Catholic church once and never went back. The priest lambasted us about "sin" and "hell", words which I had not experienced being used so harshly in my church back home. I didn't like hearing that I *was* a bad person and *had* to repent my sins. I had grown up believing I was a good person and an honest one. I began searching for an alternative.

I didn't have to look far, as there were several New Age shops in town which caught my eye. They had beautiful crystal jewellery, small and large crystals, and plenty of fascinating books. I read widely, soaking up every concept, story, and idea. Many of the books spoke about the "fourth dimension" and the world of the future where there would be peace on earth for one thousand years. I was very idealistic,

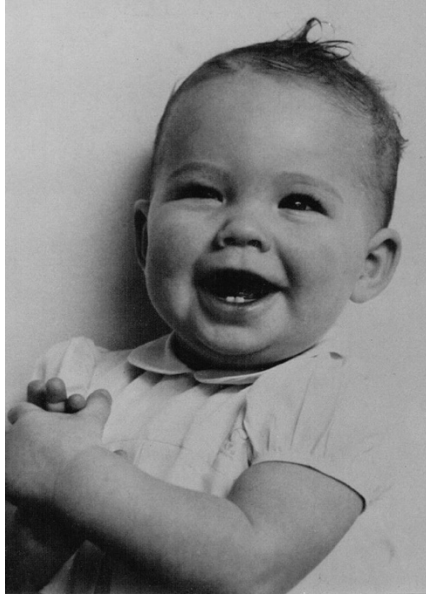
and this was the path I decided I wanted to take “The Road Less Travelled”. It was the mid-1990s and the New Age personal development movement was at its peak.

At the end of my first year of university I received quite a shock. Unexpectedly, my mother told me I had a half-sister I didn’t know existed. I learnt that my mother had given my sister up for adoption after falling pregnant to a married man. She had no support from the father and had absolutely no money, and like many other single mothers at the time, she wanted to give her child the best chance in life. It was 1970, and it was also a practice at the time for the nuns and Sisters in the hospitals to insist upon adoption for single mothers. After digesting this news, I felt devastated and confused. *How could my parents have lied to me all these years?* Apparently, my mother had met my father within twelve months of my sister’s adoption. They didn’t know at the time, but later learned that one could reclaim their baby within this period: receiving this knowledge too late had made it even more difficult for my mum to deal with over the years.

For me, having another member of the family in our lives meant a real shift in the family dynamic. I was no longer the oldest child, I was the middle child, and my younger brother was thrilled to have another sister. His friends were also delighted, as my sister was tall and slim, with long, blonde hair. I thought she was beautiful. In fact, she had just won a *Cosmopolitan* magazine modelling competition. Despite my best efforts to the contrary, her beauty made me feel inferior and it was as if she was now at the centre of my family’s universe. In addition to my already poor self-esteem, I developed a lot of self-hate, and I felt betrayed by my parents at the time, for keeping this from me.

Just before my third and last year of Uni, I was given the opportunity to coordinate my university's Orientation Week. I lead a small team of three, training 120 O'Week Leaders and organising a week's worth of activities and information-sharing for 1000 new students. Looking back, it was quite a feat. I had to liaise with university staff, the local community for sponsorship, and I had to rally and enthuse 1000 mostly teenagers who had arrived in a small country town to study for three or more years, and who ultimately wanted to have a good time. It meant that during the Christmas holidays leading up to the event I had to stay in Bathurst, which for me was tough. I was only able to see my family for a short time over Christmas and I was away from the ocean, which I craved for my sanity. Throughout my final year I was exhausted. I had received esteemed praise from university staff and my family for my achievements.

However, I still didn't feel worthy of their admiration.



Me as a Baby



In front of my School in Papua New Guinea

The Bait

AT THE BEGINNING of 1996, I had my Bachelor of Arts degree in hand, with my major in Organisational Communication and Public Relations. However, I didn't know if I wanted to pursue PR as a career after undertaking my internship. I thought that if I had had more confidence in myself, I would have majored in Print Journalism. I was uncertain of my vocation, my life, and my direction. I would often sleep during the day and felt lost and confused. I had been away from my parents since I was eighteen and now, I was back living with them. They had since bought and renovated a house at Hunters Hill. I also had to find myself a job and become *responsible*. I had taught myself to touch type when I was fifteen, so I bided my time temping in the city, doing reception and administration work.

One Sunday afternoon, I awoke from a nap and read a newspaper ad for the Mind Body Spirit Festival, occurring that weekend at the Convention Centre in Darling Harbour. On a whim, I decided to catch the end of the exhibition and have a psychic reading. I had seen a Psychic once whilst at university and thought I desperately needed some direction in my life. I drove into the Festival and just before it almost

closed for the day, lined up for a reading. The lady with whom I sat down gave me some interesting insights into myself, the first of which was my Individual Totem. She used American Indian animal cards and when I picked out the Buffalo, she said my first personality trait was Abundance. I was happy with that, as I dreamed of being wealthy and creating a great life for myself. The reading continued with answers to my questions about relationships and finances and finished with advice on exactly the direction I needed to take. She said there was a course I should do which would transform my life and give me the motivation I needed to succeed.

‘Members from the organisation “Life Integration Programmes” are here at the Festival – you just need to go to their stand and they’ll give you further information.’

I was elated. I thought *this is exactly what I’m looking for!*

I rushed over to the stand with hope in my heart.

The people on the stand welcomed me enthusiastically and confirmed that their program, *The Next Evolutionary Step*, would give me the tools to make the changes in my life I wanted – and that the changes would be *permanent*. The program, they told me, was devised by a woman named Natasha Lakaev. They handed me a brochure with Natasha’s photo on it, and it stated that Natasha had taught 13,000 people to unlock their potential. It promised the course would “enable you to access your fullest potential in regard to all aspects of your life: health, fitness and appearance; wealth and financial security; relationships, friends and family”. The people I spoke to were so friendly and vibrant and seemed genuinely happy. They wrote down my contact details and said they’d

send me an info pack, before telling me that I should come to the free Introductory Session at The Hilton Hotel, where the program would be explained more in-depth. I was excited about attending the free first session. As I left the exhibition, I thought the afternoon's events had been a *sign*. Hours earlier I had been home in bed, and now I was on the cusp of Dynamic Change!

~

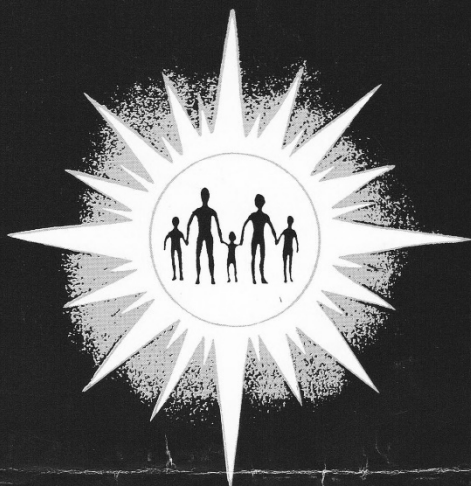
I had many areas of my life I wanted to focus on: my low self-esteem, my career prospects, my weight, and, of course, finding Mr Right. I also wanted to work on my fear of failure *and* my fear of success. I pre-read all the written material I had received in the mail and listened to the included meditation tape, which featured Natasha in a commercial radio interview on side B. It all appeared very professional. My mum came with me to the introductory seminar where Natasha stood at the front of the room. Natasha was slim and petite, and had long, brown, curly hair. A scrunchie, tied around her ponytail, matched her red skirt. To me, she looked fit, healthy, and full of energy. She was charismatic, confident and came across as extremely knowledgeable. Everything she said *made sense* and I was in awe.

Natasha pointed to a diagram on the projector, explaining that we were all like fleas in a jar. 'The lid has been kept on top of us for so long, that even when we take the lid off, we still jump no further than the top of the jar because we are conditioned not to.

‘*The Next Evolutionary Step* will teach you to jump higher than the jar.’

She outlined several other very convincing concepts and to finish, students who had previously completed the program stood up and gave their testimonials. Natasha told us that the program would take place at Macquarie University.

At that moment, I felt my life *was* going to change. I felt renewed, excited, and ready to transform myself. I was twenty-one years old. My mother and sister said they would attend the course with me, my mum proclaiming that she was accompanying me to ensure it wasn’t a *cult*.



The Next Evolutionary Step

The Awakening

Presented by: NATASHA LAKAEV B.App.Sc
for Life Integration Programmes

Cenolage Pty Limited Established 1982
Australian Company Number: 002 480 908

The Next Evolutionary Step Brochure

The Next Evolutionary Step

Is an experientially based programme that enables you to access your fullest potential in regards to all major aspects of your life, i.e.:

- * health, fitness and appearance;
- * wealth and financial security;
- * relationships, friends and family;
- * being able to identify the issues that create stress and deal with them effectively;
- * understanding your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual makeup.

The process comprises of a full weekend and three (3) evening sessions.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROGRAMME

The course is designed to reconnect you to the untrained or psychic areas of your mind and to show you how to remove the blockages that keep you repeating your life patterns and prevent you from recognising and following your true opportunities.

WHY CHOOSE THIS PROGRAMME?

This system of learning revolves around awakening your potential through a series of wholistic methods that unite clearly the individual's interaction between the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self.

By highlighting this interdependence you come to understand why or why not certain wants and needs elude you.

As children we were never taught to understand what we are comprised of, i.e.: how to handle relationships and your role in them, how and what it is to be male or female, how to be successful without having to forfeit any or one of the above.

Thus quite often you believe that this inner capacity to handle all facets of your being and therefore life are not available to you.

This course removes this fallacy from your belief system.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

We instruct you through a series of meditations, exercises, lectures and workshops on removing the mystery of how to become totally reliant on your intuitive capabilities.

This is achieved by illustrating to the mind how it perceives information flows and the many factors which influence this - the greatest barrier being how you contend with your current "social coding" which has been set up by your upbringing and ensuing years.

The methods used are gentle yet determined, meaning that all participants will achieve the same level of awareness by channelling energy to unlock these vital doors.

You all innately know that you have an inner capacity to overcome all trials and issues that confront you but you are not quite sure of how to go about this hence a strong sensation "that something is missing in our lives but we cannot 'pinpoint' what it is," pervades.

You therefore continually ignore the quiet guiding voice within you.

This programme concisely illustrates how to overcome this confusion and replaces it with the ability to respond to your inner knowledge.

THE RESULT

Each individual 'taps-in' on the energy provided by the universal light and vibration this is your hereditary right, therefore in essence you take 'The Next Step' in to the globe's future, by absorbing this level of peace and allowing it to become an inherent part of your physical system. Consequently you gain the skills to be able to smoothly move on with your lives with grace and joy, thus stepping over any inner or outer turbulence.

More specifically benefits include:

- * Excellent levels of self confidence.
- * Better relationships.
- * Easier communication.
- * Knowledge of how to release stress.
- * High levels of clarity.
- * Ability to manage emotions.
- * Expanded concentration, creativity, personal power and therefore self expression.

WHO DOES THIS COURSE?

Individuals, partners and families who wish to adjust the way they handle their lives, who believe they can improve relationships, who know there is more to life than they are currently experiencing, individuals who want to move through the challenges of life with enjoyment and those who have expectations of themselves that they feel they cannot currently access.

Therefore this programme is available to persons from all walks of life:

- * People seeking success.
- * People with chronic or terminal illnesses.
- * Housewives/husbands.
- * Tradespeople.
- * Executives/professionals.
- * Teachers/lecturers.
- * High school and university students.

Life Integration Programmes

COMPANY HISTORY AND OBJECTIVES

Life Integration Programmes and more so its parent company Cenelage Pty Limited was formed to create and present life skills programmes that do improve the quality of life for a maximum number of people (13,000 to date).

Our goal in the greater picture is to assist in the shift of human consciousness by allowing each individual to live the knowledge of their total potential, thus enabling the global social consciousness to become harmonious, this can only be attained when each individual and family group realise their own importance and self worth.

FOLLOW UP NIGHTS

These are held monthly to assist people in further increasing their knowledge, healing and life skills.

The programme and follow up nights are available from:

BRISBANE GOLD COAST,
SYDNEY LISMORE.

For details phone (066) 77 1519.

OTHER COURSES INCLUDE

- * *Universal Healing.* How to heal yourself and others.
- * *Freedom in Relationships.* For couples wishing to expand and find their dual purpose.
- * *Children's Awakening.* Ages 5 to 13, to develop psychic and creativity.
- * *The Final Step.* Total integration of human potential, removal of all limitations. The art of living *Deliberately.*

YOUR COURSE INSTRUCTOR

NATASHA LAKAEV B.App.Sc.

A vibrant personality with an exceptional understanding of the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual connection.

Natasha's background includes a Bachelor of Applied Science that majored in Alternate Lifestyles and learning systems that concentrated on the principles of wholism and the psychology of how we integrate into our world and the effect this has on our overall health and wealth.

Since 1984 she has concentrated her efforts in the study of human development, potential and healing.

She has been guiding individuals and instructing groups in this area for over 11 years and is successful without exception with those who wish to partake in gathering this knowledge and ability.

Prior to creating LIFE INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES she was Managing Director of a national training organisation specialising in life and work skills, an organisation that has trained in excess of 12,000 people during those 7 years.

Natasha has a warm and humorous approach to teaching, combined with genuine care and understanding.

Her ability to unlock human potential and psychic experience is exceptional.

YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Consists of a minimum of 12 energetic and dedicated people who are there to assist you with every stage of this exciting programme.

Each team is headed by a fully trained and licenced instructor who also presents major portions of the programme at the various locations that the course is held.

The instructors are also available for ongoing assistance and counselling within those areas which include:

BRISBANE, GOLD COAST, LISMORE, SYDNEY.



TO ENROL

Fill out the enclosed enrolment form and send to:



Life Integration Programmes

"OMAROO"

Hunter Street
Burringbar, NSW 2483

Phone: (066) 77 1519

Fax: (066) 77 1519

The Switch

ON 3 JULY 1996, the three of us made our way to Macquarie University for the five-night and two-day *The Next Evolutionary Step* program. We hadn't been told about any of the upcoming processes. The information form we received in the mail gave us only details about the venue and start and finish times, while stating we had to "bring a plate of vegetables and fruit to share on the Saturday and two vegetarian dishes on the Sunday". When we arrived, we were told by staff at the front desk to "keep an open mind and leave your logic at the door". Loud music played as we entered the room, and we took our cue from the Support Team and began dancing until the song came to an end. Posters of motivational sayings were pinned up on all four walls including "Fake It 'Till You Make It", and "What You Resist, Persists".

Natasha introduced herself as our instructor and said she was the Managing Director of Life Integration Programmes or LIP. She described her programs as imparting "Universal Knowledge". "Everything has been designed to help transform your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual self. Emotions are the smallest, yet most powerful particles in the Universe and through the process of Accessing, you can

remove your unwanted Cellular Memory from this lifetime, your biological bloodline, and your other, past lifetimes.'

Natasha explained that Accessing was the process of extreme, emotional release via yelling and screaming on a black mat or into a pillow. She said that this process was why her courses were state-of-the-art. 'No one else on the planet is teaching this,' she said.

'Your ultimate goal is to Cleanse your Cellular Memory to become lighter, brighter, more prosperous and reach your full potential. More importantly, you need to do this for your children, to free them from the heavy, burdensome Cellular Memory of their predecessors so that they can lead the next generation into the New Age.'

Natasha said she had three children and spoke regularly about how hard she had worked undertaking these same processes to ensure her kids were the incredible human beings that they are today.

During the program, we had numerous sessions of Accessing. We were instructed to Access any issues we had with our parents, friends, teachers, or people from our past. I remember feeling totally overwhelmed. It was difficult accessing my emotions on demand, and it was frightening listening to the 80 or so people around me becoming highly aggressive and emotional, pounding their fists onto black mats. At one point, I huddled in a corner with my mother, holding onto her for dear life. Natasha walked over to us and said, 'I think you'd better stop hugging your mum now, otherwise you're going to be stuck in that place *forever*.'

A feeling of complete failure swept through me. *How could I be such a baby?* I realised I shouldn't be looking to

my mother for support. *I should be facing my fears, taking responsibility, and doing this all on my own!*

Natasha seemed to know everything about everyone. She said she was psychic and I believed her. At one point, I put my hand up and said: 'I'm feeling so many fears and it doesn't feel like I'm ever going to get rid of them all...'

'But haven't you been fearful your whole life?' she responded. 'It's going to take some work.'

In that instant, I felt that Natasha *got* me, she *understood* me. *Yes, I had felt scared my whole life!*

I knew this woman was going to be the one to help me push through my fears. I truly believed she could read people's minds. I couldn't wait to rid myself of all my hang-ups. Conversely, I was terrified of what I'd be expected to do next.

Each night when we got home, which was generally around 10 or 11pm, we had to do a series of stretches, and listen to one of Natasha's meditation tapes as we went to sleep. We had to buy at least one tape, but we were encouraged to buy them all. The meditations consisted of relaxation music with Natasha speaking as the voiceover. The topics ranged from *Prosperity Consciousness*, *Creating Your Own Reality*, and *Communicating with your Guides*. I bought as many as I could afford. There were also glass cabinet displays full of beautiful crystals which we could purchase. We learnt that the crystals were especially powerful and Cleansed as they were kept on Natasha's property, Omaroo, which we were informed had an exceptionally high Vibration.

There were parts of the course I found incredible. We performed processes which were designed to open up our

psychic ability. For example, we sat in front of someone, and we had to stare into each other's eyes for around twenty minutes. I could see the person's face contorting into what looked like animals or different people's faces. We had to say whatever came into our minds and when my partners agreed with elements of what I was saying, it really seemed like I was picking up on that person's past, present or future. I was so excited. We were also instructed to look up the meaning of our name. Mine said 'Carli: German. Strong Woman.' Periodically we were asked to stand up and state our name and its meaning.

I would stand up and say, 'Hi, my name is Carli, and I am a strong woman.'

At the time I didn't sound very convincing, but I promised myself I would work on it until I did.

When the course came to an end, I felt so light and on a high, but I still felt like I had a *long* way to go. It was then that Natasha told us that there were actually other programs that she offered if we felt we wanted to remain on the journey of personal enlightenment. She claimed that it was totally up to us to decide and said that she offered programmes that could take us to our full Integration (evolvment).

There were around seventeen other programs. Each promised to facilitate *change* which guaranteed you would achieve all the things you needed, wanted, or desired in the world. We were told we could also do the *Psychic Reader's Certificate* program, *Metaphysical Practitioner's Certificate* or *Personal Mastery and Metaphysical Counselling Certificate* whereby we could learn all the skills to then make an income out of what we had learnt. We could even

eventually become an Instructor of Natasha's courses if we completed all the programs and if we were deemed fit to do so. I thought to myself: *this is what I am destined to do, to become an Instructor.*

I decided my calling was to learn the abilities to help make other people's lives better. I was a perfectionist and I realised I had to keep going so I could rid myself of every single piece of "baggage" I had left over from this life, my ancestors' lives, and my past lives.

Natasha said if we wanted to Integrate successfully, we needed to stick to a strict vegan/vegetarian diet, exercise daily, juice and meditate. It was also imperative that we Accessed regularly. She recommended that we attend an Accessing session with one of the organisation's trained counsellors in their home. She said there were also trained metaphysical healers who could balance our bodies and realign our chakras, ("the seven main energy centres of the body"). We were given a list of who was fully trained and their contact details. We were assured they were all members of the Metaphysical Association of Australia (a body I later found out Natasha had incorporated herself). I immediately booked onto the next two programs, *Universal Healing* in September, and *The Final Step* in October. The cost to me for the first three courses, including *The Next Evolutionary Step*, was around \$5000 at the time.

'OMAROO'
Hunter Street
Burringbar NSW 2483
Australia



*The
Next
Evolutionary
Step*

presented by
Life Integration Programmes
NATASHA LAKAEV B.App.Sc.

MANAGING DIRECTOR

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Life Integration Programmes

What Now?

Now that you have completed *The Next Evolutionary Step* you may feel that you have learnt an enormous amount, however, your journey of coming to understand yourself has only begun.

There are many issues that may rise out of your subconscious over the ensuing weeks, months and years because *The Next Evolutionary Step* is *The Awakening* of your psychic abilities and your true system, your intuition - it is a beginning.

We have enclosed for you a package of information that outlines details about the other learning experiences *LIFE INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES* undertakes, its audio and video tapes, follow-up activities and avenues for personal guidance in the form of Metaphysical Healing, Psychic Reading and most importantly Metaphysical Counselling.

Areas such as company policy in regards to students and other programmes along with information on our overall aims and objectives are also enclosed.

Also attached are details about the *Association of Metaphysical Healers, Psychic Readers and Metaphysical Counsellors*.

LIFE INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES and all it's associated courses have absolutely no religious or cult affiliations and neither do we have intentions either now or in the future of allowing this to occur.

Many people believe that because an individual has chosen to become "who they really are" that they have been "brainwashed", therefore we urge you not to coerce people into doing *The Next Evolutionary Step* but rather show them by example ("*walking your talk*") and through discussion that there is a lot more to life than feeling suppressed or obligated to outmoded people and lifestyles.

We look forward to meeting you on other programmes and sincerely wish that you create yourself a reality that gives you all your heart's desires.

Remember you choose your path and destiny and most importantly it is all your responsibility - if you accept this throughout all your subsequent programmes and while making decisions, small and great, you will never feel life is a burden nor will you move back into Victim and / or Martyrdom Consciousness (not for very long anyway!)

It is essential to remind you, it is not the destination that is important but rather the journey, '*Stop and Smell The Roses.....*'

"freedom is your very nature.

*Whatever stands against that freedom must be set aside,
be it ritual, superstition or limitation in any form."*

Yours most faithfully,

Natasha Lakaev B.App.Sc.

MANAGING DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER

Life Integration Programmes Manual - Page 1
"What Now?"

Humiliation

THERE WERE AROUND eighty students on the *Universal Healing* program, held at Natasha's property, Omaroo, in Burringbar, Northern NSW. The property is around sixty acres, with breathtaking views of the Burringbar Valley and Mt Warning. It is about ten minutes inland from the coast, thirty minutes north of Byron Bay and eleven hours' drive north of Sydney. The weekend course taught us about crystals in detail, and healing methods for oneself and the planet. We created wonderful bonds with fellow students, and we were all thrilled to belong to this relatively new and exciting group, LIP.

One morning we travelled to Pottsville Beach to watch the sunrise. We sat and meditated on the sand for what felt like an eternity. Then we were instructed to look out to the ocean and see what appeared. I was straining to see what everyone was talking about when several people said they saw what looked like a city and Natasha verified that it was the ancient city, Atlantis. I thought there must be something wrong with me. *Why can't I see this extraordinary vision?*

We all slept on the floor in the function centre, and the following day at around 4am, we were woken up and told to get out of our sleeping bags and get dressed. We weren't told where we were going as we hopped on a coach, but we ended

up at the foot of Mt Warning. It was completely dark, and I didn't have a torch. We congregated at the bottom of the mountain. Natasha instructed us to choose a group depending on how fast we thought we could climb the mountain. I was always a little overweight and under-confident in my abilities, so I didn't think I'd better choose the Number 1 group, so I chose the second.

During the climb I realised, *actually, I'm fitter than I thought!*

I was enjoying the adrenalin pumping through my body and I increased my pace, separating myself from the Number 2 group. When I was close to the top, I started yelling out to group 1 to see if they would let me know where they were. No one called back so I continued to do this until I saw some of them ahead and eventually reached their group at the very top.

When we arrived back at the property, we were informed that *Universal Healing* was predominantly about demonstrating one's Patterns (our habits and predisposed personality).

'The hike you have just completed,' Natasha said, 'was designed to show you which Patterns you currently hold and what you need to change. The Number 1 group are the "I-Centred personalities": those who are only out for themselves. The Number 2 group are the "would be if you could be's".'

She rattled off the other groups' names and then suddenly looked at me.

'There were also two black clouds on the mountain today,' she said. 'They were Carli and Theodora.'

She told the group that our behaviour was very dominating and that our actions had overshadowed everyone

else's experience on the climb. One student chirped in that the plastic bag I had been carrying was so annoying as I thrashed it about that he couldn't handle it. I felt absolutely humiliated at being singled out. *I must be so disgusting*, I thought.

Feelings of self-loathing came pounding to the surface. I vowed that I would get rid of all the excess *sludge* that I must be carrying around and that I would become more like Natasha. To make matters worse, later that day on a break, a guy named Dominic turned to me and said, 'stop following me!'

I felt mortified and ugly. *Why was I doing that? Didn't I realise I wasn't pretty enough to talk to him or hang around him?*



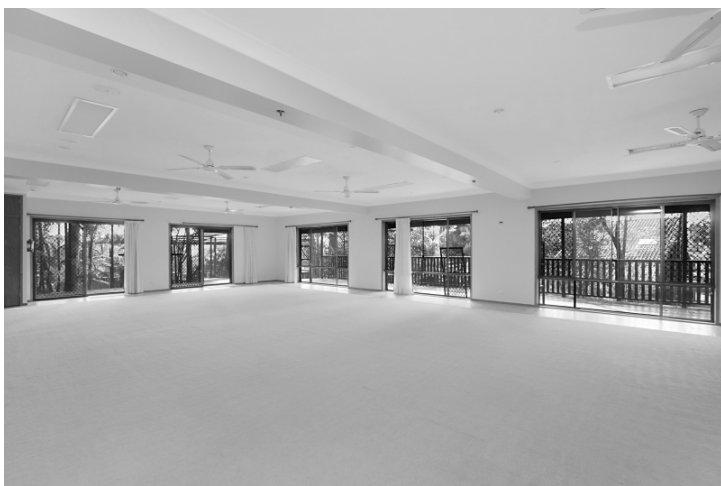
Natasha's House and the tiled LIP Star



Overlooking Burringbar Valley and Mt Warning



The Omaroo Centre and Office Upstairs



Inside Omaroo Centre Where Courses Took Place

Above four photos sourced from [realestate.com.au](https://www.realestate.com.au) - Ray White
Rural Murwillumbah

Fear, Powerlessness, Conformity

IN OCTOBER THAT same year, I travelled to Brisbane to attend *The Final Step* program. There were about seventy of us who met up at the University of Queensland campus and we waited outside the allotted meeting room for what seemed like several hours. We didn't know what was going on inside, but we waited patiently, anxiety building up with every mounting moment. I had been given the impression by students on *Universal Healing* who had completed *The Final Step* that this week was going to be a real challenge. They were not allowed to tell us the specifics of what had occurred on their program. The brochure we had been given at the end of *The Next Evolutionary Step* stated that *The Final Step* was a course you could "only complete once" so you had to put all your effort into it to benefit fully. In my case, I believed I had to come out on the other side *a completely different person*.

Once in the room we were told we had to hand over our wallets and ID, and we were asked to hand over anything else we had brought that was not on the List to Bring sheet we had been given prior to the course. I had spent a lot of money on camping equipment for the course, some of which was now taken as contraband.

We were also told we could not go to the toilet without permission. This directive sent me into a heart-stopping panic. I had always had a weak bladder, going to the toilet whenever I could so that I didn't feel uncomfortable in the fear I may be stuck somewhere without one. I began to realise, with a sense of terror, that this week was going to be far worse than I had expected.

We were then asked to choose which Patterns we wanted to overcome. Natasha read out scores of options like "obesity", "sex addiction", and "alcoholism". We had to stand up when a Pattern that we wanted to break was called and a Support Team member would come around with a specifically coloured and shaped sticker to put on our name tag. I wrote down on my course folder what all of mine symbolised so that I wouldn't forget. Standing up in front of everyone meant that there could have been a lot of judgementalism flying around the room: however, everyone was too pre-occupied with themselves and what was about to happen to be worried about anybody else.

We were then taken to a bus where the windows were covered with black sheets. The coach trip went on for hours and all I could think about was hoping I didn't wet my pants. When we got out at the other end it was daytime and we were on a rural property. We didn't know where we were, and we had no means of getting home even if we wanted to. We were stuck in the middle of nowhere. Natasha and the Support Team stood in a line in front of us with expressionless faces. We were instructed to line up in our ten or so groups in perfectly straight rows. I was with a couple of people I

recognised from *The Next Evolutionary Step* and *Universal Healing*, but most of them were strangers to me.

Natasha stood at the front and centre of the Support team in her black cap, light blue polo shirt and tight, black leggings. She said: ‘the first thing we are going to do is give each other a genital rub. Turn to those behind you and give their genitals a good, fast rub, then turn to the person in front of you and do the same.’

Everyone looked at each other with raised eyebrows, but once we started, everyone became quite jovial, and this invariably lightened our mood. Then it was straight to business.

‘This will be the toughest week of your life.’

Natasha’s voice reverberated across the desolate area.

‘You must do everything you are told by me or one of my instructors and you have to do it within a specified timeframe, or there will be consequences.’

We were then allowed to go to the toilet. There were three Port-A-Loos standing off to one side. We were each given approximately two minutes to be back in a straight line. My heart raced as I ran to one of the toilets, relieved myself as quickly as I could, and ran back.

Natasha told us we had a number of jobs we had to complete on a daily basis. One group had to keep the toilets clean, one group had to fetch water from the creek for showers, another had to serve meals, etc. There was one group who had to be our ‘Metaphysical Police’ which meant they had to look out for mysterious events or items that appeared or disappeared, that could not be logically explained.

It became evident very quickly that Natasha and the Support Team were no longer our friends. They began yelling at us to go and do things, or to be quiet when we were talking in our line. We had each been asked to bring a foldup chair and were told to set them up in a large, white marquee. After the experience of climbing the mountain during *Universal Healing*, I had been scared that I'd have to carry the chair up another big hill, so I had brought a very small camping chair, which I now regretted.

Inside the enclosed marquee, we received lecture after lecture from either Natasha or members of her Support Team. Topics ranged from learning about our Personality Structures, including whether we were I-Centred or You-Centred, and whether we were Overt or Covert in nature. We were also taught random things like how we should dress. We were told never to wear black, which carried dark energy, and to wear a lot of white. It was recommended that we should wear clothes that would reflect us "blending in" with society. We danced to 80s and 90s pop songs before sitting down; we did regular meditations and chanting. At times, it seemed like we were being lifted into out-of-body-experiences.

We also weren't getting a lot of sleep. We would be made to sit in the lecture room into the night, and the next morning, we would be woken in our tents by the Support Team, yelling for us to get up. It felt like we had hardly slept at all. If we were listening to a lecture in the marquee and started falling asleep, we were made to stand at the side of the room and hold a large rock above our head. Some people dropped the rocks because they were so fatigued.

Astoundingly, there were only a few near misses to their heads.

Every morning we had to perform a long run, with half the group running and half the group “supporting”. Afterwards, we had to strip all our clothes off and jump into a pond, whose waters were too dark for us to see beneath the surface. We were told we could only come out once we’d been instructed to do so, and that we were not allowed to urinate in there. I was very frightened as I thought of the possible creatures in the water that might bite me.

If we didn’t do something within a certain time limit, like make it back in time from taking a shower, we would be punished. This consisted of doing things like 100 push-ups or 500 sit-ups. If one person did not complete the task, we all had to start again until everyone did. We had three regular meals allotted.

During one night in the marquee, we were told to take off all our clothes and stand up on a platform in front of the whole group. ‘If you can stand naked in front of people,’ Natasha explained, ‘it means you are not hiding anything from the world, and no one can overpower you.’

While each of us stood there, we had to list which parts of our body we liked and which parts we disliked. The group then had to respond with their own comments about our body. I felt completely humiliated up on stage, conscious of sweat dripping from my armpits and accumulating in pockets around other areas of my body. I already hated my body, and this process affected me profoundly. I felt gross and violated, *again*.

We were also shown hard-core pornography of straight and gay sex, to which I had never before been exposed. I was still a virgin and very innocent. This was something I felt incredibly uncomfortable witnessing. I don't remember the reason given for this session, I just recall it being late at night and pitch-black outside.

Towards the end of the program, we were told we had to go without meals as punishment for something we had done wrong. We were all starving when at some stage at night a few cans of tomato soup were discovered outside the kitchen area. As we had not eaten for an unknown period, some students bashed the cans with rocks and several of us ate some of the cold, uncooked soup out of the can. After we had finished, Natasha came out of her tent and said: 'for those of you who ate the soup, you can continue to go hungry, but for the rest of you, you can enjoy a delicious, hot, cooked meal for *obeying orders*.'

There were other processes which did have a positive slant and whereby we felt that anything *was* possible. We had a huge bonfire one night and were told ancient stories of the Australian Aboriginals and native peoples of the earth while we watched the blazing flames form shapes, and we were warmed by its intense heat. I walked close to the fire and felt like I was in another time and space, sensing that I would not get hurt. The next day we walked over the hot coals with bare feet. I was scared, but after I'd accomplished it, I felt invincible! I had no marks on my feet and didn't feel the burn until I did it a second time to prove to myself I could do it again. All the processes we undertook had some kind of existential element to them. We felt like we were experiencing things outside of this world. We thought Natasha was the only

person who could give us this spiritual high and connection to mother earth.

When the last day of the course finally arrived, the feeling of relief was palpable. Natasha stood before the group and informed us we had slept for only seventeen hours throughout the entire seven-day programme. ‘You should all feel proud of yourselves for your amazing feat,’ she said. ‘What you’ve just experienced was designed to bring up your fears so that you could release them. You can now use this program as a benchmark and know that anything is possible!’

Natasha said she had proved to us that we were Unlimited and that there was no such thing as time. ‘It will take a good twelve months,’ she continued, ‘for the result of the program’s processes to pass through your System to reach its full Integration.’

On our way back to Brisbane we were told of the impending celebration we would have that night and were promised delicious food and plenty of dancing. At the beginning of the program, we had been asked to pack evening gowns and suits in a separate bag: these, we were told, would be waiting for us in our motel room. We all looked shocking. We were exhausted and filthy, covered in scratches and bruises.

When we arrived at our destination – a motel at Logan near the Gold Coast – it felt incredible to have a hot shower, wash my hair and to eat proper food again. I was in shell shock, having come from such a harsh environment, to donning a formal dress and high heels in order to dance in celebration. Although Natasha and the Support Team now had smiles on their faces, I didn’t quite feel comfortable enough to let my guard down completely.

DON'T QUIT

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must but don't quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns.
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out.
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt.
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worse
that you must not quit.

The Final Step "Don't Quit" Handout

Italy

ALTHOUGH I WAS still reeling from the experience of *The Final Step* (and appeared highly unstable to my family and friends), I was desperate to step straight onto the year-long programme *Personal Mastery and Metaphysical Counselling* which commenced in December. I was bitterly disappointed when I couldn't come up with the \$10,000 that it cost to do it. As an alternative, in early 1997 I decided to complete a retake of *The Next Evolutionary Step*.

During the course, Natasha noticed me and said, 'Hi Carli.' I was so ecstatic that she remembered me, and she seemed friendly. When it came time to look up my name and what it meant, I read a slightly different definition this time: "Carli: free woman". At the end of the program, I asked Natasha what I had to do to feel lighter as I was still feeling heavy and stuck. I hadn't been running or meditating like I'd been supposed to, and I wasn't sticking to a healthy diet, so I was constantly feeling guilty and inadequate. Natasha said, 'if you want to get anywhere, you have to stick to your Regime and you should start seeing Anne once a week for counselling.'

Anne was one of Natasha's senior Support Team members who lived in Sydney.

I had been babysitting my cousin's eight-month-old son for about six months and was Accessing regularly with Anne, when unexpectedly, I was offered a position as a nanny in Italy. An acquaintance of my aunt, an Italian teacher, knew of a family who needed someone to take care of two daughters, and in time, a baby that was on the way. I was very excited at this prospect. To top it all off, the family lived in a castle! I was so determined to go over and experience something new that I quickly arranged everything and left just before my father's sixtieth birthday celebration. He had organised a huge party, but I was so self-absorbed that I left a few days beforehand.

Originally my understanding was that I would be looking after the children for five days during the week and then I would be able to borrow the family's car and travel around Italy on weekends. However, when I arrived, I found myself working six days and was not allowed to borrow the car, even to drive down the hill to the shops. I also had to do cleaning, about which I was not enthusiastic. I was a vegetarian in a meat-eating household and the family didn't know what food to cook for me. I remember eating a lot of bread.

I soon came to discover that the mother appeared depressed, and she was giving her six-year-old daughter medication for some kind of mental illness which greatly shocked me at the time. In reality, I was in as bad a state mentally as they were, if not worse, as I was a mess after completing the four LIP programs thus far. I was Accessing every day on runs around the block, screaming into a facecloth so that no one would hear me. My emotions were all over the

place. I was trying to come to terms with all the information I had ingested and the processes I had undergone.

When it hit me that I was to take responsibility of the newborn baby during the night so that she could rest, I decided to leave. I had only been there two months – however, the mother and I had both concluded that I was not cut out for such a role. It was clear that neither of us were what the other was looking for.

I began to backpack around Italy, lugging a very heavy suitcase. There was one incident where I used the Anything is Possible mantra I had learnt on my courses. I was on a train heading down to Rome when, during the night as I slept, my wallet was stolen. It had my passport in it along with all the money I had and my father's credit card which was to be used "only in the case of emergencies". I was determined to get it back. I walked up and down the train asking people whether they'd seen anything, and I approached the policeman on guard and implored him to find my wallet. Despite the odds, I got my wallet back! The policeman dragged a young boy of probably only thirteen up to me who handed back my wallet and apologised for taking it. It was so surreal, but my trust in the Universe and my *manifestation* abilities grew stronger.

At one point, out of desperation, I lugged my burdensome suitcase and a few other bags I had accumulated to a post office in the middle of nowhere, hoping to send some of my things back home. When I realised the international postage cost was way more than I could afford, I said, 'thank you anyway,' and turned to head out the front door.

The man behind the counter called after me, 'Wait, please Signoria, come back. I will send your luggage for free.'

He must have thought I looked like a complete spectacle and felt overwhelmingly sorry for me. I was so grateful for his generosity.

I wanted to stay in Italy and thought if I could get another job, it would be possible. I decided something in hospitality would be my best bet. I had waitressed whilst at university and figured working at one of the mud-spring health resorts would be incredible. I hitch-hiked to a small town where there was one such resort and although I tried to convince one of the managers that I could speak enough Italian to bridge the rather large language gap, he didn't offer me a job and I had to leave.

It wasn't long after this that I decided backpacking was not for me. I found an Italian Language school in the quaint, picturesque town of Sienna, which I thought would give me better job prospects. I booked onto a course and met a bunch of young, friendly students from all around the world. On one of my days off, I was sitting in a park basking in the sunshine, minding my own business, when a young guy approached me and started talking to me. I had been enjoying my classes immensely and I was feeling wildly free and content. I suddenly thought to myself, *this would be a good opportunity to lose my virginity.*

This thought was contrary to my staunch decision prior to doing LIP courses that I would save myself until marriage, a promise I had held onto throughout university. Now, it didn't seem so important.

I booked us into an expensive hotel, handed the concierge my dad's credit card, and left it with him as security for the room. The next morning, I had to head off to a class

early and I told the guy I'd been with to stay as long as he wanted, and to pick up my credit card on his way out and give it back to me when we caught up later that day. I was walking out of the hotel when the Concierge called me over to the desk and handed back the card. He said, in broken English: 'please take this, you can't trust these Italian man.'

Looking back, I was so naïve and trusting of complete strangers.

During my stint learning Italian, I met a girl from Australia who was originally from Central America. We hit it off immediately and she said she was heading to London in two weeks for a job she had waiting there. She invited me to come along and share the flat with her that she had also pre-arranged. I was elated. For years, I had wanted to live in London, and it was the perfect opportunity. Once we arrived, I managed to land a temping job within the very first week. I remember walking down to the trendy and colourful Portobello Markets and feeling on top of the world.

Suddenly, however, before the second week had even begun, I received a telephone call from my mum who told me that my dad was in hospital and was unlikely to make it beyond the next few days. He had had emergency surgery, the doctors performing five by-passes with his chest cut open for around six hours, and his body was extremely weak. I booked the first flight out that I could manage and returned to Australia to be with him. Thankfully for all of us, he survived this incredibly taxing operation and is still with us today, much to his own disbelief.

Core Beliefs, Repetition, Control

ONCE HOME AGAIN, I was offered a role as a Junior Public Relations Consultant with one of my friend's cousins. I was so happy that I had landed a job in my actual vocational field, and I decided that my next step would be to complete the twelve-month program, *Personal Mastery and Metaphysical Counselling* (PMC). Like the previous year, I did not have the full \$10,000 fee. However, I asked my manager for an advance on my salary to make up the difference. To my (and her) detriment, she said yes.

Our course group consisted of twenty-nine students, and we were known as "PMC '98". Everyone had to travel to Natasha's property, Omaroo, in Burringbar, almost every weekend. Again, nothing was pre-explained about what the program would entail, we were only told to 'keep an open mind and not have any preconceptions.'

We soon discovered that the course consisted of reading numerous New Age books and completing summary reports on each of them within a certain timeframe, before passing each book onto the next person in line; counselling Case Studies; interpretations of Emotions, Dreams and Body Parts; writing summaries of Natasha's meditation tapes; and a number of other processes. We had to buy all the meditation

tapes, of which there were around fifteen, and we had to pass around two sets of books between the group and hand in assignments by a specified date. Our assignments had to be at Omaroo by the due date or we would have to “Redo” the assignment. When a girl in the group tried to beat the system by completing all the books in one sitting before sending them on, we were all disciplined by having one set of books taken away from us. Because I and two others were living in Sydney and the rest of the students were in Coffs Harbour, the Gold Coast or Brisbane, we had to send the books to each other by coach instead of regular mail to speed up the process. When eventually time constraints did not allow for courier by bus and collection at the bus depot, we had to send the assignments by plane. Ansett at the time provided this service. Our life was in a whirlwind. As the year progressed, we had Redo assignment upon Redo, and it felt like an impossible, uphill battle.

We had to keep a daily speech diary, dream diary and meditation log. We were also given an even stricter Regime than was previously given on past programs, which we had to stick to each day, or we would be punished. We were made to adhere to a strict vegan diet which meant no meat, eggs or dairy, and in addition, we were not allowed any sugar or salt; we had to prepare and drink two litres of fresh juice daily; run 10km in one stint; and meditate for half an hour. If you did not complete the 10km run on one day you had to do 20km the next day and it would build up cumulatively if you didn't get it done. Of course, the system was all based on honesty, and we were encouraged to be open about *everything*, including thoughts, feelings, and Issues. Punishments for not sticking to the diet or runs consisted of 100 or more push-ups

and sit-ups, similar to *The Final Step*. Group members would single people out and bring up Issues with the “weak” or “lazy” members, yelling and screaming at them, sometimes getting physical with them to try and Shift them (from being Stuck) so they would not fail to adhere to the rules again.

This type of behaviour was initiated and encouraged by Natasha who would scream and yell at students over an Issue regularly and set the example for all other group members to follow. A few times during that year, she hit and shoved people to make her point clear. We soon learned, if we hadn’t already, that she had a very domineering, aggressive, and controlling personality. She was a charismatic speaker but when she got angry, she truly *lost it*. Occasionally she admitted she had a “bad temper”. At no time did anyone harm Natasha, nor tried to. She was *off limits*. She was the teacher, and we were her loyal and hardworking students. During all programs, Natasha’s Support Team sat beside her, consisting of Instructors who had completed the courses before us and were now her confidantes: people upon whom she relied on to agree with everything she said before the group. It didn’t matter whether they disagreed with her deep down or not. She had 100% backup from her Team. When someone questioned Natasha, she would immediately shut them down and the recipient would acquiesce, fearful that they would be shouted at. Of course, the threat of *physical* harm was always present.

Every time I approached Omaroo, I had knots in my stomach. There wasn’t enough room for all of us to park at the top of the front driveway near the Centre. So, we had to drive up the back road of the property and park on the large back pad. It took around ten minutes to drive around the neighbourhood blocks to get to the back road, which was dirt,

not bitumen. It was around 2km long and we had to drive very slowly and carefully to avoid rocks and loose gravel. After we parked our cars, we then had to carry our heavy backpacks full of clothes and books, as well as a box of food for the weekend, down a steep, unstable hill until we reached the Centre. I was terrified I would fall, and it increased my anxiety before the weekend had even begun. We'd always be kept waiting, sometimes for up to an hour, until Natasha and the Support Team finally motioned for us to come inside.

The expectations and workload we had to endure during PMC were ridiculous. We were highly stressed and exhausted. Each of us had to maintain outside employment, some students also juggling their home life with a spouse and/or children. For many, it was an impossible feat. A number of people dropped out during the year. We were told by Natasha to persuade them to stay to continue their Integration via *any* means possible. We visited them as a small group in their homes or called them to convince them to remain on their path to enlightenment. Some came back onto the course; others left the organisation for good.

We also had to document every Issue and topic discussed, and any secrets that someone had divulged, which would be handed in as meeting minutes to the head Support person each month. This meant that anything that was said in front of Natasha was notated, as well as everything else said behind closed doors. She was aware of all, one way or another.

THE PURPOSE OF

THE PERSONAL MASTERY & METAPHYSICAL COUNSELLING CERTIFICATE **(PM&MC)**

The purpose of the PM&MC is:

To give you the opportunity to develop your abilities as a counsellor.

To fine tune your skills so that you may aid individuals in their healing and balancing of self where conventional methods have not been fully successful.

To make achieving the impossible an everyday experience.

To open your soul to the unlimited possibilities of helping, healing and counselling others thereby healing the planet.

Experiencing the powers of unconditional living for the self.

Experiencing the powers of unconditional giving to others.

To realise through first hand experience that the template for healing and counselling the individual is the beginning of the healing of the planet.

To learn, accept and adjust your personal patterning to enable all of the latter purposes to be fulfilled.

To come to know where you come from, why and what to do with this new found knowledge and counselling ability.

To experience neutrality of existence with real purpose and clarity.

To become a balanced person with your spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical being in alignment.

To learn how to continue your progress as an evolving energy through true interdependence.

To understand what "Life Integration" actually means by experiencing this first hand within your own personal world therefore enabling you to master yourself thus becoming capable of counselling others neutrally and effectively.

To facilitate the process for your Personal Mastery which is paramount for the coming changes especially if they are to occur passively.

***"Purpose" of Personal Mastery & Metaphysical
Counselling Certificate***

PMC 1998 GROUP ASSIGNMENT

DATE DUE: 30TH JANUARY 1998 & EACH SUBSEQUENT MEETING

During each PM&MC session various skills, knowledge and information will be shared with you individually and as a group.

We would like your PM&MC to produce the following assignment as a group:

- 1) A complete summary of all data shared with your group and each individual during instructing sessions - every topic is to be covered, with all skills and miscellaneous knowledge shared with you notated.
 - 2) It is to be succinct, covering any information gained by the group or any individuals within the group.
 - 3) It is to be written in point form.
 - 4) It is to be written in the chronological order that events, discussions and knowledge occurred in.
 - 5) This assignment is to be completed at the end of each weekend, one day or evening session and is to be handed in at the next get together.
 - 6) Also attached to this assignment in chronological order is to be the minutes from each subsequent PM&MC Meeting you may have as a group and this is to be inclusive of Sydney, Gold Coast and Brisbane Agendas and minutes.
- * All small meetings or impromptu meetings are to have minutes created and the details provided in the next assignment.
 - * Each time it is to be a group assignment.
 - * Please create a folder into which all this information is to be filed and thus ongoing assignments are to be kept in the folder in date order - this will be left available to you so you can add each portion of the assignment to it, whenever you arrive - the most recent details are to go on top.
 - * This assignment will be continued thoroughly and succinctly until the PM&MC 1998 11:11 Task is completed.
 - * You are to ensure that at least once a month your assignment is handed in to Pirjo Dickinson for appraisal.
 - * Pirjo will then ensure that at least one other support member evaluates this assignment and then you will receive at least two written feedbacks on it as soon as possible.

PMC Group Assignment – Instructions to Hand in Minutes from Each Meeting and Get Together

I lived at Bondi Beach for most of my PMC year with a fellow student of LIP, but who was not doing *Personal Mastery*. I would go for my 10km runs around the Bondi to Bronte footpath, which followed the ocean. Initially I could not run 10kms straight. I would run, stop, start, and run again until eventually I could run it all. Most of the time I would run at night around 11pm with only the moonlight to guide me. It was the most dreaded item on my daily to-do-list, and I would often fall over and graze my hands and knees by tripping on something or because I was so tired. It was a good excuse to yell and scream into the facecloth I would carry and Access my angst at having to adhere to the rigid Regime.

One night I met up with a good friend I had met on *The Next Evolutionary Step*, Vanessa, who also lived in Bondi. She had only completed one or two initial LIP courses. She was slightly older than me and worked in the magazine industry. We walked down to the beach and sat on the sand watching the waves roll in.

‘How is it going?’ she asked gently. She could see that I was not my usual bright and optimistic self.

‘Not good,’ I said, my head down.

‘Why, what’s wrong?’ she asked, concerned.

‘I’m just such a terrible person.’

‘No, you’re not!’

‘Yes, I am. I have so much I need to change about myself. It’s so hard. I hate myself.’ I started to cry.

‘What have they been telling you?’ she demanded.

‘*Nothing*, it’s all me,’ I exclaimed.

‘What have you been doing on the course?’

‘I can’t tell you,’ I muttered. ‘You know we’re not supposed to disclose the processes.’

Vanessa’s face looked stern, and she tried to comfort me and tell me it would all be ok.

As we walked home, I knew that would be the last time I confided in her.

~

During my PMC year, I completed several other programs on top of our rigorous PMC commitments. One weekend, I attended *Being Male Being Female*. On this course, the males and females were separated during most processes except for mealtimes and for one activity at the end where we had a male versus female Debate, which was intended to be light-hearted and funny. My most vivid memory was when we were divided into our male and female groups and told to take off all our clothes and hug each other. The object of this exercise was to realise that no matter how skinny, fat, or different we are, we’re simply human beings who feel warm and soft to touch. For me, it was incredibly confronting and made me feel entirely squeamish, as my skin connected with each of the other women in my group. I can’t imagine how it made the males feel, who at the time, I was grateful, were completely out of our sight.

Later that month I took part in the program, *Other (Past) Lifetimes*. This was actually an amazing experience whereby we were asked to lay down on the course room floor and the Instructor used a microphone and described places and points

in time that we would have to picture in our mind's eye to enable us to re-experience our Past Lives. The lights were turned off and the curtains closed, and specific music played over the loudspeaker for each time period. I felt like it literally transported me into other worlds. We were asked to focus on different periods in history or the future as well as other dimensions. For example, we had to think of ourselves in the fairy realm, or living on another planet, or our life during Jesus' time.

One session focused on the period of Atlantis. I envisioned myself as a beautiful young woman with wavy, blonde hair, who wore a white and sky blue, long, flowing dress. I saw gorgeous crystals all around me and I worked with music and sound. I felt like I was very spiritually connected in that lifetime. I pictured a High Priest hurriedly telling me that 'corruption' had taken place on Atlantis and that the island was going to be destroyed. He instructed me to step into a small boat which transported me to a large ship. I then travelled to Egypt where I subsequently saw myself lonely and depressed, staring out to sea from my bedroom window, within a large palace. I communicated telepathically with those still on Atlantis before the island rapidly sank into the ocean.

In another session, I had images of me burning Natasha (who I saw as a witch in this lifetime), on a stake. I was horrified I would have done such a thing and I told Natasha afterwards what I had seen. I often looked back to this image, considering its significance. In future years, Natasha would lament that it would be myself and another Personal Master, Kate, who would be her "ultimate downfall".

I also completed the three-month program, *Metaphysical Practitioner's Certificate*, which, once passed, would certify me as a qualified Metaphysical Healer. We learnt the technique of hands-on-healing where we could open closed chakras and make sure that these energy centres were unblocked and flowing clockwise. We also learnt about which crystals to lay on different sections of the body to help heal ailments and chronic diseases. During and after a healing, we felt refreshed and rejuvenated, and were told we should ideally have a healing once per week, but at the very least once a month, to ensure our Systems (bodies) were in check. Personal Evaluations were given by Natasha to each student at the completion of certificate programs. At the end of the *Metaphysical Practitioner* course, Natasha wrote about me:

Attitude and Professionalism:

“On the surface quite good but underneath it you are judgemental and tend to ‘seethe’ over undisclosed issues. Deal with this or else you will miss out on ‘actually’ healing your clients.”

Areas to be Particularly Focused On:

“Aggression, arrogance, manipulation, immaturity, & victim consciousness. If you let it all hang out, you will be a very competent healer & more – find your total integrity it is the key!”

Litespeed and A Current Affair

DURING 1998, NATASHA began heavily promoting a gambling system, devised by herself and her new partner, Luke – a past student and now Instructor – to her students on all programs from *The Next Evolutionary Step* to *PMC*. It was a horse-betting system called *Litespeed* which was based on “intuition”. She said she had been extremely successful with it and assured everyone that with Luke’s training, we would all make a fortune. She offered different levels of the system ranging from \$2000 to \$40,000, where we could either work the system ourselves, or for a fee, Luke would manage our bets. The presumption was that if Luke ran the system for us, there was a guarantee of success, as he was known to be highly intuitive and psychic. I convinced my father to go with me to the marketing pitch and I persuaded him to buy the \$2000 system, which I also bought myself. A number of students paid for the \$20,000 or \$40,000 systems.

Within the first week the system was not working. We all asked for an explanation as to why it had failed. Natasha told us that it was our own fault because we had not adhered to the system correctly; also, it had something to do with our Patterning. When I asked Natasha for further specifics on my

personal situation, she said ‘you and your father have ingrained poverty consciousness.’

Ahh, that’s why it didn’t work for us.

Many people were outraged and demanded their money back, but Natasha’s policy was not to give refunds – especially not for this. She mostly ignored all the calls and requests until people eventually stopped chasing. Many people turned away from Natasha and LIP at this point, including Anne, who I had been seeing for counselling on an almost weekly basis for the past eighteen months.

A small, core group of ex-students approached Channel Nine’s *A Current Affair* (ACA), relaying their experiences of Natasha and the money that they had just been conned out of. ACA approached Natasha for an interview, which she accepted, inviting the media crew to Omaroo. She believed the journalists were there to question her on her state-of-the-art processes of personal transformation. Once they’d set up their cameras on the pool deck outside the back of Natasha’s house, instead of being asked about her cutting-edge techniques, she was shot question after question about *Litespeed*. David Margan, the interviewer, made statements like ‘tell us about the psychic horse-betting scheme you devised which has ripped off scores of innocent people.’

Among other things, the TV journalists also asked about the claim she had made to students of PMC ’97 that she was a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Her answer to this question was evasive and she neither denied nor admitted her beliefs.

As was Natasha’s general practice, she had covered all her bases by getting her ex-husband Phillip to secretly videotape and voice-record the interview from behind the

curtains in her house, thus ensuring she had footage of any *biases* that the media representatives may have presented. She would later use this footage as evidence to convince those who questioned her in her favour, claiming the program's journalists had taken everything she had said out of context. Before the show went to air, she asked us all to write multiple positive letters about the amazing things we had experienced in Natasha's programs and describe what an incredible woman she was. We sent these letters to Ray Martin, *ACA*'s presenter; the show's producer; and Kerry Packer, the owner of Channel Nine at the time. At the end of the *A Current Affair* episode, Martin held up a thick pile of papers to the screen, citing that there were a number of people who disagreed with the program's slant on the story.

After this dent to her reputation, Natasha was desperate to resurrect her credibility. She immediately went into massive damage control. She would spend hours and hours in the course room explaining to us PMC '98 students what was *really* going on and the *actual* circumstances that had led up to the interview. She gave all manner of excuses for the accusations that had been thrown at her, and she carefully answered any questions from us: her remaining loyal, but confused, followers.

She relayed story after story about "the whole PMC '97 situation" as most of the ex-students who appeared on *ACA* were from that year's intake. She explained that the PMC '97 group was trying to tarnish her reputation, so that she would not expose all their secrets: such as the fact that many of the girls had been working as prostitutes before starting Natasha's

courses, and that many of the men were either criminals or mentally ill.

‘These students were all having sex with each other,’ she explained, ‘which is why I brought in the rule this year that no one is allowed to have sex with anyone else in PMC. Factions within the group were established which caused a lot of infighting. Issues were not being brought to the Group and because of this, the year culminated in the suicide of one of the young males.’

Apparently, this young man’s girlfriend – who was also taking the course – had fallen pregnant, and, despite his protests, had undergone an abortion. Natasha concluded: ‘I was in the dark about this incident, and if the students had brought all of these details into the open, the young man’s suicide could have been prevented with my guidance.’

Someone asked: ‘Is it true that you are a reincarnation of Jesus Christ?’

‘All I can say, Natasha replied, ‘is that we all have many Shafts within our Past Lives, this life, and the future, of which we are a part, and they are all happening simultaneously. When I was younger, I would have episodes where my forehead, wrists and ankles would turn blood red.’

She paused, before reminiscing: ‘It was such a *problem*. I used to have to wear my fringe over my face to cover it up.’

From then on, I believed Natasha *was* Jesus Christ reincarnated. I hoped that I had been one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, and I knew I wanted to serve this woman to the ends of the earth. In later years, Natasha referred to me as Judas on more than one occasion, which, after my memory of burning her at the stake, I believed to be quite plausible.

I was determined not to betray her again.

As I completed each program and listened to all the information and advice that was imparted to me, I soaked up everything with enthusiasm. Natasha preached that we had to Cleanse ourselves on every level, so that we would become fully Integrated to make it through the Shift of the earth's axis. This would be a period of Survival, where the world as we knew it would come to an end. We would have to defend ourselves from other people, fighting over food and shelter. Only then, as Cleansed and Light Beings, could we be transported to the Fourth Dimension.

At university, many of the New Age books I had read described similar notions about the fourth dimension which prophesised 1000 years of peace. I abhorred war and violence and was highly idealistic. I was already very open-minded, and the reiteration of potential future events was easily processed as a reality to me. At Sunday Mass every single week, I had been told 'Jesus will come again.' I was also aware of Aristotle's prophesy of Armageddon. *Why wouldn't I believe every word Natasha said? Someone had to be Jesus come again.* I never questioned her honesty or integrity because Natasha stated in almost every conversation that she had these two qualities firmly intact.

Natasha convinced us that everything that went wrong in our lives was our own fault, and that any doubts we had about Natasha as a leader were a projection of ourselves, not representative of her. I believed I had to change every aspect of my defunct personality if my (future) children and I stood a chance in the time of Survival. Natasha told us that if our family or friends weren't following us on this path, then we

had to separate from them and leave them behind. We were told we were ‘screwed up’ due to our parents’ influence and that we needed to be free of anyone who was going to hold us back. She made us believe we were special, that we were the Chosen Ones, just because we were following *her*. She stated that only a few other groups, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, also knew about the future Changes. Whenever I needed strength to continue my hard and arduous journey of enlightenment, I drew upon Natasha’s teachings, all of which I had carefully stored in my mind.

~

Under the pressure of the *ACA* coverage of the *Litespeed* scandal, Luke disappeared without a trace. Natasha instructed all PMC ’98 and Combined PMC students (the combined group of all previous PMC years) to head out on foot to find him. We covered Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Northern NSW. Natasha gave us printed posters to pin up everywhere with the heading “Missing” in bold letters, accompanied by a photo of Luke and Natasha’s office contact details. Behind the scenes, Natasha was calling numerous Psychics on 1900 numbers to try and track him down. She told us all that she was afraid Luke would try to take his own life, and that she was beside herself with worry. She had visibly lost a lot of weight and claimed he was the love of her life: she didn’t want anything to happen to him.

Throughout this search, Natasha explained that Luke’s mental state was unstable. She feared he had developed schizophrenia ‘due to his mother’s influence’, which she had

suspected when he first commenced the programs. Soon afterward, she also revealed that Luke was gay. Through her investigations, she said she'd discovered that he had slept with at least 100 men, actions that were the result of his precariously fragile, schizophrenic, mental state.

In the end, when she couldn't find Luke, he became the scapegoat for *Litespeed*. Natasha blamed him for the creation of the system, telling everyone that *Litespeed* was actually his company, that he was its director, and that he had stolen all our money and gambled it away at Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast. Luke had also, according to Natasha, taken money from some of her office staff, and gambled that away as well. Of course, she claimed, she hadn't known anything about this previously.

At the beginning of the year, one of Natasha's secretaries – the Godmother of Natasha's youngest son, Timothy – had also ran away. After Luke left too, Natasha declared: 'Only those who are strong and have follow-through are capable of reaching Integration. Some people just can't handle this enlightened path.'

~

Once we had completed the major portion of our PMC assignments, Natasha told us, one night in a meeting, that she had something special in store for us. She explained that, due to us counselling people from all manner of society, we had to be prepared and empathetic with our clients. Therefore, we needed to experience taking drugs.

Natasha proceeded to ask one of her Support Team members to bring out marijuana joints which she said were from reputable sources nearby, whom they had bought from previously. She told those of the group who were predisposed to drug addiction that they could partake if they wanted to, as it was under a controlled environment where the Support Team would be in close vicinity. However, once we commenced smoking the joints, the Support Team joined in, as well as Natasha.

The results were varied. One girl started to take off her clothes, another curled up on the floor and fell asleep, and others began experiencing paranoia. For me, it was a combination of feeling lightheaded, paranoid, and as if the room was spinning around me. I could see why people enjoyed it, but I was also extremely worried, as I had a relative who was addicted to heroin and I knew of its consequences.

One of the last course requirements on PMC was being charged with organising a function called the “11:11”. The name symbolised the date of 11th November 2011, the alleged time of the Shift. For our PMC group to be deemed successful, we had to raise at least \$10,000 from the event. The function served as a celebration after our long and strenuous year, racing around completing assignments and undertaking various processes all with a perpetual lack of sleep. Our group decided upon a 1920s Gangster Ball theme. We booked Brisbane City Hall’s main ballroom and spent hours preparing all aspects of the event. The idea was for us to get as many members of the public to come as possible, so that we could promote Natasha and Life Integration Programmes and recruit new students. We printed flyers and left them in various hubs like cafés and reception areas and taped them on street posts.

We were told to invite all our family and friends. My parents and my sister came up; my mum made my sister and I beautiful 1920s dresses with a beaded headband and handbag to match. I was thrilled that my family could see the culmination of what I had achieved that year and meet all my new-found friends. The event was a huge success and although we didn't make the full \$10,000, we came close to it.

~

Just before the conclusion of PMC, we were given another task. We were to build something on the Omaroo property that would “survive through eternity and leave a profound message throughout the Universe”. We were told to utilise the money we had raised at the 11:11 function. By this time, however, only around 15 out of the 29 who started were left, and many more dropped out at this point. The task meant that the group would have to travel to the property almost every weekend for another year, and probably for longer if the task remained unfinished. Previous years' PMC groups were still completing their task or at least maintaining it regularly. Those who stayed then joined the Combined PMC Group, which consisted of PMC students from previous years: 1992, 1994, 1995, and 1997. There were a handful left from each year.

In December 1998, at the completion of PMC, Natasha provided another written Personal Evaluation of me: “you have mountains of work to move through and there is a sense of stupidity in your decision-making process. You rarely take others into account and blindly head down roads that are of no

benefit to yourself or anyone around you. You need to mature and realize that there is another way of handling things e.g. with honesty and without manipulation”.

Meeting Michael

WITHIN A SHORT period after Luke's disappearance, Natasha became sexually involved with another PMC student, Jeremy, who had completed PMC with me in 1998. During one of the Combined PMC meetings, I innocently questioned Natasha in front of the group: 'How could you start a new relationship with someone else when it's only been a short time since Luke disappeared? Wasn't he the *love of your life*?'

'For God's sake, Carli,' she retorted. 'It's been three months.'

From this point on, Natasha became more involved in attending the meetings of the Combined PMC group, as they became spaces in which she could air any Issues she was having with Jeremy. Because Jeremy was on PMC '98, she said it was the best place for their Issues to be shared, along with other couples' relationship issues. The meetings were very loud, due to a lot of yelling and screaming between her and Jeremy. So much so, that we had to move the meetings from someone's house to a soundproof recording studio near the city. Sometimes the arguments would turn physical. PMC '98 was known as the "aggressive" and "extreme" group, as we were fearless, brought up lots of Issues and had stuck to

our regime the most rigidly throughout our PMC year. Although our aggression seemed to be getting a good airing, there was little room for much fun or the lighter emotions we were all striving to experience. ‘Those emotions will surface once you’ve cleared the heavy, dark ones,’ Natasha assured us.

~

In late 1998, I left the Public Relations firm I was working in and moved up to Brisbane. My PMC year had been a nightmare, juggling the Personal Mastery assignments and weekends travelling with the responsibilities of my job. My boss would sometimes let me leave early on a Friday, by 3pm, so that I could complete my assignments or travel up to Burringbar. I cringe as I recall, in later years, the way I used to demand that she not smoke in her own office, as it was “against the law” and I was trying desperately to Cleanse myself. She certainly put up with a lot from me. I left the job feeling extremely under-confident with my PR abilities, due to learning and achieving very little, with my sole focus on *Personal Mastery*.

In Brisbane, I moved in with a fellow PMC student, Abigail, and spent the next six months working as a temp. I was scared of my flatmate. She was a strong, athletic girl who was forthright in our group meetings. I felt inferior to her and dominated by her. Because I didn’t want to be at home, I spent the next six months eating out, going to the library, and seeing movies. I had still not had a boyfriend and I finally resolved

that I could spend time on my own and enjoy myself, without having to continue pining for *my one true love*.

And like they say, when I wasn't looking, I found him. A fellow PMC '98 student, Kate, had invited some of us to her birthday party, but I had learnt that no one else was going to attend. I wasn't a particularly close friend to Kate, but I thought she would feel pretty bad if no one came to her party, so I ran for the train and turned up for her dinner. It was the 5th of May 1999. I arrived at her house and was introduced to her ex-partner Geoff, (father of her young two-year-old son, Josh), and her flatmate Michael, who had been a classmate of her and Geoff's in high school in Lismore.

I found Michael intelligent and fascinating, and we talked all night. He pursued me on dates, taking me to picnics, serving me fresh bread he had made from scratch and gourmet food he'd created himself. I was terrified of going on a second date, but I thought, *I'm never going to get past this point with anyone if I don't push through my fears now!*

Despite my sheer awkwardness and probably his, we became a couple. I was also Michael's first girlfriend, so we both had a lot to learn. He was a virgin when I met him and I no longer was, and I hated myself for the loss of the mutually special moment we could have shared together. But we were very happy to have found each other, and the feeling was that this was for life.

In around August 1999 we decided to move down to Byron Bay, to live with Michael's family, until we found a place of our own. Ever since finishing PMC I had had a desire to work for Natasha in her office. I thought it would be the greatest thing I could possibly do, to be closer to her and

become even more Integrated. I had the secretarial experience required and could hopefully put my marketing and public relations skills to good use. However, my ultimate goal now was to become an Instructor. The plan was *perfect*.

Offer of Employment

I WROTE A job application and sent in my resume to the LIP office. I received a letter declining my application in September, but in December I was asked to come anyway, and begin learning the accounts from Noeline, Natasha's nanny and Accounts Coordinator. I eagerly accepted. I arrived at the property feeling extremely nervous, my stomach churning. I was shown into Natasha's kitchen for the first time. The house was two storeys, made of dark brown brick. Inside, it was immaculate, with stylish furnishings, large American Indian paintings, and dream catchers on the walls. Five wooden stools were lined up at the kitchen bench. Amy (Natasha's Personal Assistant), Noeline, and other Support Team members sat there, hanging off Natasha's every word, as she stood on the other side of the bench.

Natasha turned to me. 'You're very nervous, aren't you, Carli?'

I could hardly breathe as I mustered a smile. I couldn't believe I was in Natasha's house.

'Noeline will be teaching you all about the accounts,' she explained, 'but you won't be paid at this stage, as you will just be supporting her and learning the ropes.'

Because we were living with Michael's father and stepmother, Natasha offered for us to move into her rental property a few doors down from Omaroo, at 98 Hunter Street. She told us we would be sharing with Noeline, and Phillip, Natasha's ex-husband. 'You'll be closer to work,' she convinced us. 'It will be much more convenient.'

So, we did.

When Michael and I met in Brisbane, he had been working two jobs. Now that he'd moved back down to his local area, Michael had grand plans of building bush furniture, which he planned to sell at the popular North Coast Markets. He also wanted to pursue his love of music. Michael had played guitar and sung in a band at school. He secured a job three days a week at a local health food shop and spent the rest of the week alternately playing music and carving and building tables from red cedar stumps.

I began learning about the office at Omaroo from Amy, and Noeline would take me through the accounts late at night after she had finished cooking, cleaning, and looking after Natasha's children. It appeared that the accounts were a *late night* job for Noeline, after she had completed everything else for Natasha. I caught small glimpses of how the accounts were run. After a couple of weeks, I sat down with Noeline at '98' – as we called our house – while Noeline ran a bath and asked her how she liked working for Natasha.

‘It’s fantastic’, she said. ‘I enjoy everything I do. I’m also now the coordinator of ‘Litevestments’, which is great.’

Before my being associated with Natasha, she had taken *The Next Evolutionary Step* over to South Africa. Natasha stated on numerous occasions that she had been invited over, and that she had achieved immense success there with her programs. So, in 1999, once all the *Litespeed* and *A Current Affair* controversy had died down, Natasha came up with the brilliant plan to market the *Litespeed* concept to her loyal and devoted South African clients. They had not caught wind of the failure Down Under, so she decided to sell the system to them also. She renamed the system *Litevestments* and sold the packages for similar fees of \$20,000 and \$40,000. It was Noeline who was now apparently managing the system.

That night when Noeline spoke, it sounded like everything was going really well for her – that working for Natasha was as amazing as I had expected. However, when I woke up the next morning, Noeline was gone. She had left no message, no trace. She had vanished, leaving all her furniture and belongings behind. Michael and I were bewildered.

Why had she left?

After Noeline disappeared, I commenced tidying up the accounts in Natasha’s office. I found that the accounts had not been left in an organised fashion – due to Noeline’s other demands, I suspected – and realised that there was a lot of work for me to do to get them up to scratch. This new job was a challenge, but I believed I could get my head around it. In my scanning of paperwork, I noted that leading up to that point, Natasha’s office and property maintenance staff had all been paid. Before long, I discovered that Amy was on

government payments for the unemployed and was forced to lie to Centrelink every two weeks, claiming she was “looking for work” when in fact she was doing unpaid work for Natasha. Noeline had not been getting paid either. I reasoned with myself that before *A Current Affair*, *The Next Evolutionary Step* had been filled with seventy to a hundred students in various cities, but now the numbers were five or six at most. *There obviously isn't enough money to pay us right now*, I reasoned.

Noeline's leaving was bad news for Michael and me, as Natasha asked us to cover Noeline's rent as well as our own. We also had to pack up all of Noeline's belongings for when her son came to collect them a few months later. Because I wasn't getting paid by Natasha, I got a part-time job waitressing in Byron Bay. Between Michael's part-time wage and the small amount of money I received from the restaurant, we started to struggle financially.

I brought up the topic of my getting paid to Natasha every now and then. Her answer was always the same: ‘There's not enough money at the moment.’

I was determined to remain dedicated, and figured that what Natasha could *teach* me, by my simply being in her presence, made up for the lack of remuneration. I was working for a great cause. Natasha was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, after all, and she was going to save us, and take us into the New Age. *What better purpose could I serve?*

I soldiered on, supporting Natasha with what she had preached on many occasions was her ‘mission to take five million people from across the planet, through *The Next Evolutionary Step* program.’

This would mean that humanity's Cellular Memory would be Cleansed, and the Chosen Ones would Integrate into the Fourth Dimension, where they would live with peace, happiness, and prosperity.

I was now working until 10 or 11 every night and coming home tired and anxious. I was struggling to hold my relationship together, as Michael would be angry that I was up in the office so late. I told him that there was typing to do, accounts to complete, and other jobs that Natasha's PA had left for me to do.

In addition, Natasha had instructed all her PMC students to go on a juice fast to help eliminate any backlog that may have existed in regard to the past twelve months to two years. Most of us were doing it – however, once everyone else finished after one or two weeks, Natasha recommended I stay on it. Each week I would ask 'is it time for me to stop?'

To which she would reply: 'No, you should keep going, Carli.'

By the time I'd hit five weeks on pure juice, my body had shrunk to a never-before size 10. The only thing close to solid food that I ate was the skin of a mango, which I considered my only treat. When Natasha held a function at her house with fellow PMC students, I asked her, with desperation in my eyes, if I could stop the fast. Thankfully, she said yes. I was so grateful to be able to eat again.

Because Natasha could no longer afford to pay her maintenance staff either, they had all left – so she now had her small band of Combined PMC students perform monthly "Working Bees". A tight, demanding schedule of whipper snipping, mowing, cleaning rooves, cleaning the function

centre from top to bottom, cleaning her two-storey house inside and out, maintaining all the gardens and cleaning inside the large water tanks, was carried out in militaristic fashion. It was a full weekend, with twenty or so people taking time out of their personal lives to work for nothing, their only reward being their belief that they were contributing to a greater cause: their salvation.

It was regularly ingrained in our minds that we would be in Survival one day and that we would die if we were not by Natasha's side at that point. So, we worked hard, showing Natasha that we were faithful, and that we could definitely follow her instructions without question, for when that time came. We knew she had all the knowledge and Survival skills we didn't, and that we'd better not let our negative Patterning get in the way, causing bad decisions!

Coupled with my work in Natasha's office and the monthly Working Bees, I was also completing our PMC '98 task. Our group had chosen to build a wooden boardwalk that led from the course function Centre down into a gully. At the bottom of the stairs, we created a beautiful meditation ring with a marble mosaic, made from scrap marble and granite contributed by my ex-flatmate Abigail's parents, from their family business. We planted fruit trees and native trees across the steep, sloping hill. We had to whipper-snip the whole gully so that we could complete the project, and the maintenance of the grass became a never-ending headache.

Previous PMC groups had created a bird and butterfly garden, built a pergola, and planted fruit trees; another group had built a dam with walkways, planting beautiful palm trees

and shrubs. In the future, PMC '99 constructed a children's playground on a hill with magnificent views overlooking Mt. Warning, complete with a cemented walkway leading up to it. They also planted numerous native and fruit trees.

A photo on the wall in Natasha's office depicted the property when she and her ex-husband Phillip had first purchased it. It showed only the house and no other buildings, with the rest of the land completely green with untamed vegetation.

The Next Evolutionary Step Book

IN EARLY 2000, Natasha decided she would write a book about *The Next Evolutionary Step*. She asked Amy and I to help her with the process of collating the content for each chapter, and she asked one of her Instructors and Kate, who were both artistic, to help with the illustrations. The book was essentially a summary of *The Next Evolutionary Step* program curriculum, along with the diagrams she used in the course handouts. I then compiled lists of agents and publishers in the UK and US and sent packages of the manuscript with a cover letter to scores of these companies. The only bite Natasha received was from a UK company, who wanted her to pay them to read the book and write a report. After some months, she decided she would self-publish with a small publishing company on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and distribute the book herself. I was placed in charge of liaising with the publisher.

After I'd sent him the final copy of the manuscript, Natasha travelled up to approve the book for print. Natasha subsequently berated me as I had apparently *completely changed* the typesetting format and she had to stand around for hours while the format was reset before she was finally

able to sign off on it. Despite this, I am still acknowledged in the Dedication of the book alongside Amy, as deserving of “a standing ovation”. Natasha cited me as her personal assistant.

Once the book was published, Natasha coordinated groups of all her PMC students to approach bookshops from Brisbane, and down the East Coast, to Sydney, to try and persuade them to stock the book. I had to keep tabs on how many books were in each shop and was told to replenish them when stock had run out. There were only a small number of bookshops who accepted them and placed them on the shelf. I have no knowledge of any of the books being sold. From that point on, Natasha sold them at Omaroo as part of her merchandise offering after each program. Years down the track, when Natasha admitted that her mission to reach five million students on *The Next Evolutionary Step* program had failed, she said the remaining portion could, at least, read her book.

THE NEXT EVOLUTIONARY STEP



Natasha Lakaev

The Next Evolutionary Step Book

Later that year, Natasha came up with another brainwave: to not only take *Litevestments* over to South Africa, but to recommence promoting her courses there. She marketed to her current South African student database first and organised to send over her two main Instructors to teach the advanced programs: *Psychic Reader's Certificate*, *Metaphysical Practitioner's Certificate* and *Personal Mastery*. At their own expense, the Instructors were sent over, as well as Amy, who was to perform all administration and build up the clientele. Natasha also sent over a couple of students who had completed their Instructor training the previous year.

Amy had recently become engaged and did not want to leave her fiancé. Natasha suggested that her fiancé join her in South Africa. Having just been promoted and no longer associated with Natasha himself, he refused to go with her. Amy was still sent over there. After a few months, without Natasha's knowledge, Amy caught a flight back to Australia and did not return to Omaroo to work. It was the fourth instance in my short time associated with Life Integration Programmes that someone had left without explanation. Hence, I was now in the office on my own, without Noeline or Amy. Despite this, I was thrilled to be working so hard and felt like I was finally reaching my potential. I thanked Natasha for allowing me to work with her and for pushing me to my limits. She replied nonchalantly, 'I'm glad you want to work hard, because I don't anymore.'

Holding the Fort

I HAD HAD minimal training in the accounts before Noeline left, and minimal training in maintaining the “systems of the office” as Natasha referred to them, but I was the only one left to keep up the front of the business. I remained in the office to run the enrolments and administration of courses, and to complete the accounts. Before long, Natasha asked me to do her cleaning and run personal errands for her as well. She had a couple of other PMC students who nannied her children and drove them to their extra-curricular activities, including Jenny, who had commenced the courses early on and was now one of Natasha’s best friends and an Instructor. In time, Kate, Michael’s ex-schoolmate and flatmate who had introduced us, moved back to the area, and became one of Natasha’s helpers in the house and an integral part of Natasha’s children’s lives.

In 2000, the new Goods and Services Tax (GST) came into effect, and I was told to do the quarterly Business Activity Statements (BAS). If I had any questions, I was told to ask Natasha’s ex-husband, Phillip, and I was furthermore instructed that once I’d completed it, Phillip had to check it before it was submitted. I wasn’t able to attend any training and I was worried about completing the task accurately. After

reading some of the Government's written material I had received in the post, I completed the first BAS and showed it to Phillip. He scanned it and said, 'it should be fine.'

Around this time, Natasha moved up to Brisbane in Queensland, about an hour and a half's drive north of Burringbar. She had bought a house up there, after deciding to commence a Graduate Diploma in Psychology at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) so that she could resurrect her professional reputation. Her only formal qualification up to that point was a Bachelor of Applied Science in Agriculture (although she told everyone that she had majored in "Alternative Systems"). Within that same year, she bought and sold two houses, before settling into a third at Kangaroo Point: a wealthy suburb close to the Brisbane River near the CBD.

After commencing her undergraduate studies at QUT, Natasha became ill. She told us that she had been diagnosed with Graves' Disease, which she claimed was a terminal illness. 'As the name suggests,' she expounded, 'the disease sends people to their grave.'

Natasha informed us that she had seen a range of doctors and specialists, that she was doing all she could to manage the disease naturally, and that she would use her own healing abilities, along with alternate medicine, to ensure she beat it. We were told that Natasha had put her studies on hold and that she could no longer work at the capacity she had over the last nine to ten years. She also said she couldn't do any heavy lifting, like hanging out washing, meaning others would have to help carry the load of her household chores. We were all terribly upset, and believed it was our duty to help her through this harrowing time. (Upon leaving Omaroo, I Googled

Graves' Disease and learnt that it is a chronic disease, named after the physician who first discovered it, Robert Graves).

I personally never saw any symptoms of Natasha's illness. However, Kate told me she had seen blood on Natasha's sheets, which Natasha claimed was related to her illness. What I do know is that from that point on, Natasha slept a lot, and we all had to do almost *everything* for her, domestically and otherwise. She demanded a perfectly tidy and hygienic household. She once told me that her youngest son, Timothy's, alleged life-threatening disease (something like antimicrobial bacteria) was due to her husband not keeping their home clean and tidy while their kids were little.

With the advent of Natasha's illness, the other Instructors began teaching more programmes, with Natasha's full input in the background. Natasha only taught the more advanced programmes like *The Final Step* and *Personal Mastery*.

After Natasha's diagnosis, she spent a lot of time instructing me on how to submit income protection insurance claims to two companies, ING, and AC&L. She collected evidence of her illness from a new doctor at a medical centre in town (not her regular doctor, whom she had been seeing for years). We submitted her claim; as a result, she began receiving around \$5,500 from each company per month. This continued indefinitely after she regularly received "still not fit for work" reports from this doctor.

Punishment

ALTHOUGH THERE HAD been controversy surrounding Natasha's last *The Final Step* program in 1998, she decided to run another one in 2000. In 1998, to follow up on the *A Current Affair* feature story, the show had planted a student spy on the course, who taped some of the first night's lecture at Queensland University. This spy had actually been thrown out before students got on the bus, due to Natasha's suspicion of her; however, she was able to capture footage of Natasha screaming at students to hand over their wallets, ID and mobile phones, and the crew filmed the blackened-out bus as it was leaving the campus. The journalists followed the bus to the property down at Glen Innes, NSW, and filmed various activities in the bush.

Although worried about any spy activity on this subsequent *TFS* 2000 program, Natasha went ahead and marketed to her South African students as well as her Australian student database and succeeded in getting a small number of about twelve onto the course. This time, students met at Omaroo. Natasha needed more numbers to run the course effectively and so at the last minute, *the very last minute*, she told three of her main Instructors along with

Jeremy (still her partner) and myself, that we were going to be doing the program as well. It was meant to be a program that one could only ever “complete once”. Natasha insisted that the clause had changed at this point in time, because each of us needed to do more work to change our appalling personalities.

I was petrified. I remembered my first *Final Step*, which had been full of fear and horrific experiences. I was shaking, and my mind was in shock, as she demanded that we go home and pack a bag immediately, returning to the property ASAP to commence the program with the other students.

Natasha had been targeting each of us about different Issues in the months prior. This was her punishment to us: a warning for us to *pull into line* or else. So, I participated in *The Final Step* for the second time, being pushed around, bullied, and screamed at for what seemed like an endless, seven-day program. One night in a lecture, the person next to me whacked me over the head with his course book as I was falling asleep. I was finding it increasingly difficult to stay awake.

This time around I had stood up in the introductory session and pledged to lose weight, as I felt I had put on a few kilos in recent months. I became part of the weight loss group, in which you could only have your three meals per day, no seconds, and you had to get weighed every day. During the runs, I found I could not keep up with the *less Integrated students*, which was frustrating, as I had become quite fast during my PMC year. I also found it almost impossible to hold my bladder until we were told we were allowed to go the toilet. There was an activity where each group had to construct

a raft and swim down a river on or beside it. As soon as I'd finished, I ran up to one of the Support Team, my eyes bulging, and pleaded to go to the toilet. Although contrary to the rules, he took one look at me and replied 'yes'! By the end of the programme, I had actually put on weight, not lost it, and I was confused and devastated.

One day soon after, back at Omaroo, I asked Natasha what it meant if my nipples were hurting and feeling very sensitive. She said, 'you're pregnant.'

Sure enough, I discovered I was four months pregnant. I had been working on adrenalin and had not been in the headspace to even contemplate what was happening to my body. No one could believe that I had completed the gruelling, physically, and emotionally challenging *Final Step* programme whilst pregnant.

Everyone joked that it was an 'immaculate conception' as Michael and I had barely spent five minutes alone with each other over the past months. I had been working such long hours and was always too tired to do anything other than fall asleep upon arriving home. Of course, I was in a psychological mess again, processing what had just happened to me, and I now had to come to terms with the fact that I was going to have a child. Michael was my first boyfriend and we had been together for less than eighteen months.

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It wasn't long after this that Natasha announced she was going overseas with Jeremy and her children to Europe, over Christmas, for six weeks. I was shocked: all year, she had been

saying she had no money. Michael and I were struggling to pay the rent for 98 Hunter Street. Phillip had now left the house as well, so we were paying full rent, as Natasha expected nothing less. I had not been paid anything that whole year. I had also witnessed, during that year, Natasha purchasing an Audi for \$60,000 as well as expensive clothing and electronics, among other things, for her and her boys. Furthermore, I knew she was going out to restaurants three or four times a week in Brisbane, as I was reconciling her credit cards each month. I was starting to question what was going on and I was getting *really pissed off*.

Before Natasha left, she called Amy and begged her to come into the office to *manage* me while she was away. Natasha said she was desperate to have Amy in the office as she claimed things had been a nightmare with me: apparently, I was not as efficient as Amy, and Natasha needed her expertise to handle the payments of cheques and oversee her accounts. She also asked Amy to edit all her course curriculums, a job that Amy had not completed before she left. To my disgust, Natasha paid her \$500 a week to do this, and Amy was able to come into the office and take the curriculums home with her at 4 o'clock each afternoon, so she could catch the bank and post office on her way home. I tried to counter the arguments in my head: *Natasha is giving Amy this money because Amy would not have done it without getting paid*.

It made me feel sick.

During this period, in December 2000, Michael stepped onto PMC '01. According to Natasha, Michael needed to 'get up to speed' with my Integration. He commenced the program with only two other students: Rebecca from Sydney, and

Madeleine from Brisbane. By this time, student numbers were really low. With Michael doing PMC, I was worried for myself and our baby, as Michael was my only support whilst I was pregnant. I did not nurture myself very well and had little food, eating mainly toast prepared using a toaster I kept in the office bathroom, and not drinking enough water. We had very little money, so I never stopped working to take time out to have a proper meal: I felt guilty if I did. In addition, one of Natasha's rules, throughout my entire time working at Omaroo, was that I was not allowed to use the function Centre's kitchen. She said that I didn't wash the dishes and so the kitchen was out of bounds. This meant I couldn't prepare or heat up any food in the microwave, even though I spent lunch and dinnertime at the function Centre every day.

~

Meanwhile, around November 2000, Luke turned up out of the blue. Natasha brought him into a Combined PMC Meeting one night, so he could apologise to everyone. She asked him to explain what he had done. Luke said that he was, in fact, the Director of *Litespeed*, not Natasha, taking full responsibility for its whole concept and system. Natasha presented a letter that she said Luke had written and signed, which stated that he was the instigator of *Litespeed*, had stolen everyone's money, and gambled it away. She explained that Luke was currently undertaking treatment for schizophrenia and that he was in and out of hospital, concluding that his mental illness was the reason for his actions. Then she informed us that this letter would be sent to all *Litespeed*

investors, and that she was making sure Luke received all the help he could get to overcome his illness.

We all said we understood and did not seek any compensation for our losses.

Psychological Abuse

UPON LUKE'S RETURN, Natasha set him up in a business called Fresh Zen Wholesale. Luke's family worked at the Brisbane Wholesale Fruit & Vegetable Market, and via his connections, Luke, on behalf of Fresh Zen Wholesale, secured contracts with six or so businesses. Luke would collect fruit and vegetables from the markets and deliver them to shops in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. The money he made went directly to Natasha to "make up for the mess he had created" before he ran away. I was doing all the administration for the business, and while no wages were paid to Luke, none were paid to me either.

I was tired and hungry, and I was growing more and more depressed. Natasha had put 98 Hunter Street up for sale and Michael and I were desperate for it to sell. We couldn't afford the rent and we were looking at a very dismal Christmas without any money for presents and with little hope for any time off. When Natasha left for Europe, it was hard for me to explain to my parents how she'd been able to go on this very expensive trip while also telling me she had no money to pay me wages. It was difficult for *me* to digest, let alone for them: I felt anger simmering inside me, although I turned these

thoughts around, convincing myself: *I mustn't be good enough to get paid.*

I pleaded with Luke to ask Natasha if we could have some money for the Christmas period, and he said she could spare none. Michael and I were calling the local Real Estate agent frequently to ask whether there had been any bites on 98.

While Natasha was away, Luke asked me to transfer \$5000 into the Fresh Zen Wholesale account to pay bills. Previously, Natasha had forbidden Amy from transferring money over the internet: all cheques, Natasha instructed, were to be written and signed by Amy herself. However, Amy received permission from Natasha for me to transfer the money online. After a short time, Luke asked me to transfer another \$5000, and another, and another, all with Amy's knowledge and permission. By the time Natasha arrived home, about \$25,000 had been transferred by me. She was livid, and screamed at me, *'Why did you do that when you knew you were not allowed to make transfers?'*

I protested, 'You said it was ok for me to transfer the first amount, and then Luke asked me to do the others, and Amy knew what I was doing. She didn't say not to.'

'No, Carli!' Natasha screamed. 'Luke manipulated you to transfer those funds to pay his own debts! Don't you know he's a gambler and a thief? You are a fucking idiot, you stupid bitch. You do whatever you want to do, you c*nt.'

I was then 'In The Shit', as we would come to call it whenever Natasha punished someone for an extended period. The only way you came out of The Shit was by climbing your way out of it – by working harder, smarter and beyond the call

of duty. This would involve being screamed at daily, and punished with menial tasks like cleaning, whipper-snipping, or office admin, all hours of the day and night, making you feel degraded and worthless.

Natasha admitted to me years later that she knew Amy had known about the transfers and that it was really all *her* fault. But these admissions only made me feel better momentarily. Nothing could take away the hell I had already experienced, the feelings of guilt and self-hate, the utter confusion of my brain as it tried to unscramble the twists and turns of what Natasha *said* happened, and what I actually *knew* happened, in the recesses of my mind.

~

Natasha would regularly verbally abuse me on the phone from Brisbane, or while she was down at Omaroo. Constantly she would scream at me, calling me a ‘liar’, a ‘selfish brat’, and a ‘fat, lazy dog.’ Invariably she would finish with the line, ‘you’re a fucking c*nt.’ I would just go numb on the other end of the phone and try to block it out. *It is my fault*, I repeated to myself. *I am the problem*.

I was convinced that she was actually trying to help me Integrate my *bad personality*. After being abused, I would Access immediately afterwards on the floor of the isolated office, crying, screaming and self-berating over and over. I would then try to block all my thoughts and move on from the episode as quickly as possible.

To the relief of Michael and myself, 98 Hunter Street eventually sold. We moved to a property about 20 minutes

south of Burringbar, to Coorabell in the Byron Bay hinterland. We were in a gorgeous little wooden cabin, situated on a family's property. We thought we would be sufficiently away from Omaroo and Natasha's demands to feel some distance – however, it proved to be a foolish move. Michael transferred to a job in Lismore, in a music shop, and because we only had one car, his commute – dropping me off north to Burringbar, driving southwest to Lismore, picking me up again at night and then driving home – was a two-hour round trip. It put even more pressure on our relationship, and to make matters worse, I was never good at estimating the time I would be finished completing all the jobs I had to do, on top of any last-minute requests from Natasha. It often meant that Michael was waiting for me at the office for up to four hours, usually until at least midnight. During this time, he would complete his PMC assignments or try to get some sleep on the hard floor, and he became increasingly irritated.

Sebastian

I WORKED RIGHT up until the night of the birth of our son, Sebastian, which took place in Sydney while I was working at the Mind Body Spirit Festival. It was May 2001. I was there on a stand with Michael and a small group of PMC students, to promote *The Next Evolutionary Step*, just as others had five years before, when I discovered LIP. I was promoting the course as if I was the happiest and most satisfied customer in the world. I was doing free healings for anyone who was interested, and the objective was to get as many people's contact details as we could so that we could send them a *TNES* information pack. One night, after the Festival my waters broke. It took time to find a hospital that would take me as I had not been booked into one and I had no health insurance. My parents rushed me to the Royal North Shore Hospital in St Leonards, with Michael in tow. My mother was thrilled that I would be giving birth in Sydney.

However, a few months earlier, Natasha had been present with Abigail, my ex-flatmate, when she gave birth to her son, and I was determined to have Natasha at the birth of my firstborn also. I wanted Natasha's Divine presence, which I believed would have a positive impact on my child. I called

Natasha who was up in Brisbane and asked if she could fly down. She said yes and brought Luke with her. (She was now involved with Luke again as Jeremy had run away a few months earlier).

My mother was very upset that I'd asked Natasha to help with the birth. I had had very little contact with my parents during the past three-and-a-half years. Whenever we did speak by phone, our conversations were short, and my tone always very neutral. I couldn't divulge what I was doing up at Omaroo, as everything had to be very secretive. Along with the content of the courses, I couldn't reveal anything about the work I was doing for Natasha, or any details of her personal life. Separation from my family was well underway. Past hurts resurfaced. Now that I was giving birth to my first child, I thought about my mother, who in my mind had abandoned her firstborn. I couldn't conceive how a mother could do such a thing. I no longer respected her. Natasha had periodically dropped insults about my mother leading up to that point, calling her I-centred, selfish and a bitch. Natasha also spoke badly of my sister after instructing her on *The Next Evolutionary Step*. Looking back, I can see that Natasha was jealous of the love between my parents and I, and envious of my sister's beauty and vibrant personality. She wanted to destroy anyone who made her recall, and regret, her dysfunctional relationship with her own family.

I didn't know at the time, but my mother had been a midwife, delivering up to 100 babies throughout her nursing training. However, I now revered Natasha over my mother.

Once Natasha entered the room, I immediately gave all my attention to her. This escalated to the point where, out of sheer embarrassment, my mother had nothing to do but read

the newspaper while she waited. This made me even more annoyed as I then saw her as uncaring and unhelpful, which reinforced the opinion I had created of her. I eventually asked my mother to leave. I said that I wanted Natasha to help me with the birth of my son, as she had helped my friend and had *experience*. My mother was heartbroken. As she collected her things she asked me, ‘Do you want to keep the magnets I brought along to help ease your pain?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘I don’t need them.’

Natasha scoffed at my mother once she’d left and commented on the level of spite emanating from her.

Sebastian was born around twelve hours later. I didn’t take any drugs while giving birth, as Natasha had taught that any drugs taken by the mother during birth would lead to the child becoming a drug addict later in life. After the pain and trauma of the birth, I asked for gas as the doctor stitched me up. I had not taken any time before the birth to consider my body: no yoga or stretching, no breathing or relaxation exercises. Michael and I had managed to squeeze in two antenatal classes in Lismore whilst feeling very guilty for taking time out from work. I probably attended one check-up with a GP.

Luke was in the room during the whole birth process. He was on medication for schizophrenia and looked terrible. Michael had massaged me for hours during my contractions, which I found unbearable, until Luke took over. Luke had been known as one of the best healers in LIP so I was honoured that he was there as well. Natasha joked that as Luke supported me, he was getting high on the gas.



With Sebastian at my Parents' House in Sydney,
Before Leaving for Omaroo, 9 May 2001



With Sebastian in our Cabin at Coorabell, Byron
Hinterland

Once it was all over, I looked forward to a week off with my baby in Sydney. However, Natasha said that it would be best for me to head back to Burringbar as soon as possible. I signed myself out of hospital before the doctor's recommended release and headed back on a plane two days later. My mother was devastated. She had seen very little of me over the past three years, and now she had enjoyed only a glimpse of her first grandchild.

I had not taken any holidays thus far, but I convinced myself that I would be able to spend some time at home with Sebastian. Within two days of arriving back at our little cottage, Natasha called me and said I had to get back to work, to continue the paperwork on Fresh Zen Wholesale. I had been trying to cope settling my newborn son while Michael was running around frantically in PMC. I wasn't cooking for myself, and Michael was too busy to prepare anything substantial for me. I was exhausted and having trouble breast feeding, as I hadn't listened to my mother's advice before I left her. I felt shattered as I dragged myself off the sofa and asked Michael to drive me to the office.

While I was working, I never took time out to sit down and focus on breastfeeding Sebastian. I felt guilty about stopping, and so I would place him on my lap, his head bunched up on a cushion, and try to breastfeed him while I typed at the computer. It felt like he was always eating and although I had to do filing and other things which required me to get out of the chair, once he was asleep, I would not want to move, as he might wake up, and I wanted to get in as much two-handed typing as I could. Needless to say, it was very difficult to get everything done. In hindsight, I realise that by

not eating properly I was not producing enough milk, so Sebastian was constantly on my breast and probably starving most of the time.

~

A month after Sebastian was born, both Michael and I commenced the *Psychic Reader's Certificate*. Like the *Metaphysical Practitioner's Certificate*, this course went for three months. Among other things, we learnt how to read American Indian animal cards to interpret relationships, business, and finance; we practiced reading Natasha's personally designed tarot cards; and we learnt how to use a pendulum, which we would hold by a piece of string and ask questions, to which it would swing clockwise or anti-clockwise to give us a yes or no answer.

Two months after Sebastian was born, I took part in the *Parenting Programme*. For some reason, Natasha congratulated me for doing the course in front of everybody, while I sat with my baby in my arms feeding from my breast. I didn't quite understand why she thought I was so special. I was determined to learn how to be the best mother I could, by following exactly what Natasha instructed me, to emulate what she had done to raise her own three, incredibly talented sons. Natasha told story after story about her child-rearing experiences, and we were able to ask questions. When I asked about her opinion on vitamins, Natasha rolled her eyes as if she was bored and couldn't be bothered answering my question. When I frowned and thought, *I've just paid \$3,500 for this program*, she began to explain her views on the

subject. Over the course of the program, we were given several handouts, one of which listed the many extra-curricular activities her children had undertaken throughout their primary school years. I hoped my children could do the same to reach their full potential.

Fraud

FRESH ZEN WHOLESALE continued until it became evident that it was no longer financially viable. Natasha then worked on getting Luke institutionalised into a psychiatric facility in Brisbane. I visited Luke at the hospital one day with Natasha, bringing along paperwork that I had been asked to prepare. He looked drugged out and weak, not at all like the strong and vibrant Luke I had once admired. Natasha asked Luke to sign over his Power of Attorney to her, and she commenced the process of pursuing an Income Protection claim on his behalf. This meant she could collect this money for herself. Because Luke had not been collecting wages from Fresh Zen Wholesale, Natasha knew she had to fabricate wages between the Fresh Zen Wholesale bank accounts and Luke's personal bank account, *after* the fact. She asked me to write cheques for five amounts – approximately \$35,000, \$30,000, \$39,000, \$29,000, and \$45,000 – from another business account, deposit them into the Fresh Zen Wholesale bank account, transfer them to Luke's account, and then transfer them back to her other business bank account, referenced as "Loans from Luke". I was told to write on cheque butts that existed within the appropriate timeframe,

cheques that had either been cancelled or were still attached for some reason.

The insurance company suspected foul play and commenced a formal investigation and legal proceedings. Natasha sought the help of Madeleine, a solicitor as well as Michael's fellow PMC member, to help win the legal dispute. Madeleine must have been an exceptional lawyer (keeping in mind she believed everything Natasha told her) as the court concluded that the claim was legitimate. Natasha was now collecting three income protection amounts, two in her name, and the other as Power of Attorney for Luke. With Luke safely in the care of the psychiatric hospital, Natasha got back together with Jeremy.

In around October 2001, Natasha gave me my first (and only) cheque, for \$5000. It included GST, so I had to obtain my own Australian Business Number (ABN), and there was no superannuation included. I was promised that sometime soon I would receive a lump sum of \$50,000. Michael and I were thrilled with this promise, agreeing that it had been a blessing in disguise to not receive wages, as it meant we could one day, in the imminent future, put the lump sum toward a deposit for a home loan. One afternoon, as Natasha sat in the home office adjoining her bedroom, she also offered me free courses in lieu of wages. I eagerly told her which courses I wanted to do, which included the *Instructor's Certificate*, and *Initiates*, which was the ultimate level of Integration we were told one could reach. Natasha wrote them all down.

At the end of 2001, Michael, Rebecca, and Madeleine finished their PMC year with their 11:11 function. By now we knew that no group had ever made the \$10,000 and most of

the time there had been a loss. After Michael's function, an art auction in which fellow PMCs created sculptures or paintings to sell, Natasha ripped into Michael about the failure of the event and the poor job he had done in his PMC year. She informed him that he had to repeat PMC.

In previous years, someone had been offered to do the course again for free, if they had not got everything, they wanted out of it – they were called a “gift” for the next group. This person was said to be the bridge between one year and the next, so that they could help carry the next group through. The last thing Michael wanted was to do PMC all over again, but it seemed he had little choice. He was thrust onto the next year of PMC with six other guys, four of whom had done PMC previously and two who were up-and-coming LIP students. It was the first PMC Redo group, and they were all males.

At Christmas time, Michael, and I, with Sebastian in our arms, travelled to Sydney to spend time with my parents. We had not seen them since Sebastian's birth in May. It was a wonderful Christmas and with the advent of the promise by Natasha that we would soon receive \$50,000 and some courses of our choice for free, we were no longer resentful for the last two years of poverty, depression, and loneliness.

Australian Taxation Office

ONCE WE RETURNED to Burringbar, Natasha became a *raging ball of fire and brimstone*. ‘While you were on holidays,’ she snarled at me, ‘I placed myself within your System and felt what you were thinking! You’re an arrogant, self-absorbed c*nt!’

I couldn’t think of what I might have done wrong. I had left for Sydney on such a high, and now it felt like my world was crashing down around me. Natasha said she had been contacted by her accountant and that there was a massive issue with the company accounts of Fresh Zen Wholesale and the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

With the advent of Luke’s new wages, I submitted an Amendment to the BAS statement I had previously sent in to the ATO. This meant that the ATO began questioning why there was such a large variance. The ATO confirmed it was commencing a full investigation and audit into Fresh Zen Wholesale. Once the investigation got underway, the ATO asked to see the accounts for all of Natasha’s companies, which included Life Integration Programmes (now named Survivor Principles), *The Next Evolutionary Step* (which

consisted of *Litespeed* deposits), the Natasha Lakaev Personal Account and The Lakaev Family Trust.

It became apparent that the accounts were not at all in order. Because I had had no proper training in accounts nor GST it only now became clear that I was supposed to have a “Tax Invoice” for every payment made, whereas I had attached only invoices or receipts, or if I hadn’t received paperwork from Natasha, nothing at all. We were told by the ATO that a receipt for payment must have the words “Tax Invoice” clearly stated at the top, with the supplier’s Australian Business Number (ABN), and if it was addressed to a company, it had to be addressed to the correct company name.

Natasha blamed me for the ATO coming in to investigate her. ‘Noeline and Phillip told you how to do the accounts properly, and you didn’t listen!’ She screamed. ‘You wanted to do it *your* way!’

‘No, they didn’t,’ I cried in protest, but it was no use.

I stood there as she repeated her theories over and over to me and whoever else was in the room. Without formal training of the new GST accounting and the fact that I didn’t receive every receipt from Natasha for all her hundreds of purchases per month, the accounts were not up to scratch: they met neither the degree of perfection that Natasha expected, nor were they acceptable to the ATO.

Thus, a new nightmare began, after which my life would never be the same. Natasha told the ATO that I was completely responsible for the state of her accounts. She told the investigator that I was a liar and that she had had no idea to what extent I was hiding this Mess. She said she had told

me specifically to collect Tax Invoices and asked if the ATO could give her time to get the accounts sorted out. Miraculously, according to her accountant, the ATO gave her a time limit within which to have the accounts in order. Natasha commanded ten female students from her Combined PMC group to help clean up the accounts, as well as her office, which she stated I had also messed up by not sticking to the systems she had laid in place.

‘Carli has single-handedly destroyed all of my businesses,’ Natasha told everyone. ‘It is her fault that there are no students on LIP programmes. She has thrown out whole piles of invoices and she has not been answering the phone when potential students call to book onto courses. She has been sleeping most of the time, instead of working!’

I whimpered back, ‘No, I haven’t thrown out any receipts and I *did* answer the phone.’

My denials were weightless. I had taken a few naps during the day whilst pregnant with Sebastian but had always answered the phone. But due to this one element of truth she spoke, I could not refute her, and I knew I would get nowhere trying to convince anyone otherwise. I wasn’t good at defending myself, and most of the time, remained quiet.

The ten females commenced going through the accounts with a fine-toothed comb, listing which Tax Invoices were missing. It fell to me to call the suppliers to have the invoices sent and faxed into the office, or else go out and retrieve those that had to be collected in person.

Physical Abuse

AS WELL AS yelling and screaming at me, Natasha began bashing me up almost every day. She would slap me, shove me, punch me, kick me, and slam hard A4 invoice folders against my head, saying, 'You did this, Carli. You're a liar. You're a lazy bitch who sits around doing nothing, waiting for everything to be handed to you on a silver platter!'

She would grab my hair and drag me around the room in front of the ten girls who were sitting quietly, trying to work on the accounts. There were tufts of my hair all over the office floor. I wouldn't raise my hands to defend myself. I would take every blow that came my way. I believed that I was guilty on some level, maybe every level. Thoughts raced through my head as I analysed why this was happening to me. Natasha had previously told me things like 'you're a spoilt brat from Hunters Hill, someone like me from the Northern Beaches would have hated you at school.'

I rationalised that my father had never hit me, and my mum had smacked me only once that I could remember. *That's why I must be going through this, to receive the discipline I missed out on as a child. This must be my time to catch up*, I thought.

Natasha had told us repeatedly that her father used to physically abuse her and her siblings as children. She said he used to do torturous things like making them kneel on marbles on the floor, and force them to stay in that position, without moving, or he would hit them. Because I had not experienced such abuse, I thought I had to go through this process myself to become less selfish, less arrogant, less *everything*.

No matter what reality I thought had taken place, or how much I tried to persuade myself that I was innocent, I was being told by my leader that I was responsible for the ATO Mess and worth nothing. Looking at my reflection in the mirror I could see bruises all over my face, and my arms, legs and torso were black and blue. I felt like I was floating outside of my body and looking back at a stranger. My mind was completely numb. I was like a zombie on autopilot.

While cleaning up the accounts I was only allowed to have two hours of sleep per night. When I was woken up by one of the girls, I had to do property maintenance in the dark until morning. I started off whipper-snipping the back road of Omaroo from 2am while being guarded by a fellow PMCer, usually Kate. Kate had her car there with us, shining light while I was working, and she would order me around and tell me what to do next. One night the car battery went flat. Another night, she ran over the whipper snipper. It was a complete debacle. Before long I was told to sleep outside, in a tent on a hill away from everyone else in the office. The tent had a hole in the roof, and I didn't have the luxury of a pillow or a sleeping bag. I lay on the cold, hard ground, trying to enjoy the only moments I had alone and away from harm, to rest my mind and aching body. Natasha told me I had to stay

away from the office so that the girls wouldn't kill me; she meant this literally. 'Carli,' she said, 'in any other dimension you would be executed for what you have done.'

She continued: 'Don't you know why Jesus and his disciples went out into the desert? It was to sort out Issues and get people back in line.'

The most unbearable thing that happened was that my eight-month-old baby was taken off me. I was told that I wasn't allowed to see Sebastian until the accounts Mess was completely tidied up. Sebastian went with Michael full-time and began long day-care five days a week. He had to be bottle-fed, much to my distress. I couldn't bear that I was such a *despicable* parent and that my actions had led to my poor baby suffering because of *me*.

Natasha said: 'You are such an unfit mother, Carli. You have raped my company; you are an abuser like no one else I have come across. I pity your son and any future children you have. You don't care about anyone but yourself. You are a selfish, I-Centred prick!

'Sebastian is better off with Mick,' she went on. 'Even if Mick doesn't dress him properly and he looks like he's living with a hippy, at least he'll get fed properly and will get the nurturing and attention he needs.'

Finally, she added: 'You need to get sterilised.'

With this, my heart broke and my body became a vacuum for self-hate. I would admonish myself every second of every day, beating myself up, thoughts swarming around in my head about what a wretched mother and gross human being I was.

Hate attacked me from all sides. When the ten girls asked me questions or wanted me to find something, I could feel them despising me from across the room. They had to travel down from Brisbane each night to pore over the paperwork, trying to make sense of things that could not be made sense of, and then travel back home in the morning. Furthermore, most of the six guys on PMC had partners who were in the office, upstairs from the course room, so Natasha regularly called the girls downstairs, including me, to air Issues and talk about what was going on in everyone's relationships.

Natasha told Michael to hit and slap me and tell me what a bad person and mother I was. 'Mick, you need to whack some sense into Carli. She's an absolute idiot. She has created all of this, and you have let her. Take control of your "wife", Mick. I can't do it all for you!'

Whether Michael wanted to beat me or not, Natasha said that if he didn't do what needed to be done, then the guys would knock some sense into *him*. Abigail and Alice were also bashed up by their partners, Dave and Dominic, Alice being severely head-butted at one point by Dominic. Dominic went on to shave Alice's head, as did Dave to Abigail's.

'Your hair represents your past,' Natasha told us.

By doing this they would be able to start anew. I, too, wanted to go through whatever Cleansing it would take for me to rid myself of my past transgressions and my obviously *repulsive* personality.

I asked Natasha, 'Should I also have my hair shaved off?'

She replied, 'No.'

I realise, now, she probably didn't want the three of us to be seen in public like that, giving the outside world an inkling of what antics were really taking place in her organisation.

Thankfully, within a few weeks, Natasha went back to Brisbane, and I was left to collect as many tax invoices as possible. I lived in survival mode, doing everything anyone asked of me without causing any waves whatsoever. I was constantly thinking about the day when I could see my beautiful baby again. One day I almost fell asleep at the wheel while driving along the highway to Byron Bay to collect a tax invoice. I was pulled over by police and was charged with Reckless Driving.

The betrayal I felt after Michael beat me up was severe. My perceived role of him as *my protector* slowly faded away. It was during this period that our relationship took a massive dive. My trust in him was shattered. It didn't matter whether his gut feeling told him that this Mess was not my fault, because Natasha had convinced everyone that it was. Michael did the best he could to look after Sebastian, while fulfilling his commitments to his second PMC process. Sebastian, I'm sure, continued to silently endure the separation from his mother.

Contract

I THOUGHT THE nightmare would never end, but in April 2002, just over three months after my hell began, Abigail said to me: ‘You have to get off the property, because Natasha is coming home for Easter.’

I was then informed that I was to go and work full-time and pay Natasha back for all the trouble that I had caused. I was to pay Natasha \$50,000 in \$500 weekly instalments until it was paid off. I was made to sign a contract in the amount of \$50,000; the document stated that I was a liar and fully responsible for the state of the office and the accounts.

The money was of little consequence to me, as the overriding feeling I had was of indescribable relief and elation: I would have my baby back. I had lost months of my young son’s life and he would once more be in my loving arms. I vowed I would never go through that pain again.

~

I found myself a job quickly, becoming the manager of a video store in Tweed Heads. As agreed, I began depositing the \$500 per week into Natasha’s personal account. I had to get a

cleaning job plus a shift at a supermarket to earn the full amount, as well as pay for Sebastian's long day-care bills. Michael earned money for our food and rent. By this time, we had moved into a small unit in Pottsville, a coastal town around fifteen minutes from Omaroo. The unit was old, but cheap. The choice had been rushed as we had had to find a place quickly and move without too much expense. Michael was asked by Natasha to do some maintenance around Omaroo, like mowing and other odd jobs, as he was now working for a Jim's Mowing franchise and had access to equipment.

In October, Natasha added another \$20,000 to the \$50,000 we were already paying, providing spurious reasons for her actions. She added \$10,000 "for the balance of what is remaining in owed money for course fees" (which she had previously given us for free in lieu of my wages); \$5000 for the "replacement of timber and other miscellaneous items from the shed at the Omaroo property, as the "...timber was damaged as a result of it being left out in the weather"; and \$5000 for "repairs and replacement of outdoor tiles that were smashed due to brutal carelessness and unprofessionalism". Michael had been working near Natasha's house when he unintentionally smashed some pavers while chopping wood for her fire. The five pavers, which would have cost \$5.00 each to replace, were used as the impetus to extricate another \$20,000 out of us. Subsequently, we had to pay \$600 per week instead of \$500.

Natasha frequently commented that Michael and I were both the result of bad parenting. She now concluded that

Michael and I were ‘as irresponsible and immature as each other.’

During that year, I continually received calls from Abigail and Alice, who were now in charge of the accounts in the office. They asked me specific questions about the accounts, or about where I had filed documents on the computer and in the filing cabinets. I felt constantly harassed and permanently stressed and angry at our situation. Thankfully I was able to use working to pay back Natasha as my excuse for getting out of some Working Bee weekends, as well as Combined PMC meetings.

Contract Addendum

Please note this Addendum is applicable to the current contract between Natasha Lakaev and Carli McConkey.

The revised amounts are in addition to the balance outstanding from the current contract which had a total of \$40,000. These amended amounts are to be paid off as a matter of priority by direct debit into the account of Natasha Lakaev, or if additional amounts are to be paid, a deposit slip must be provided to [REDACTED] weekly as proof of payment.

A minimum of \$600.00 per week is to be paid.

This amount accounts for the balance of what is remaining in owed money for course fees. \$10,000.00

Replacement of timber and other miscellaneous items from the shed at the Omaroo Property. This timber was damaged as a result of it being left out in the weather. \$5,000.00

Repairs and replacement of outdoor tiles that were smashed due to brutal carelessness and unprofessionalism. \$5,000.00

Outstanding Total of money owed to Natasha Lakaev \$20,000.00

Signed: Natasha Lakaev
Natasha Lakaev

Date: 19/10/02

Signed: Michael Greene
Michael Greene

Date: 19/10/02

Signed: Carli McConkey
Carli McConkey

Date: 19/10/02

Witness:

Date: 19/10/02

Witness:

Date: 19/10/02

Sexual Power Play

WHEN NATASHA ANNOUNCED she was running the program *Freedom in Relationships* with Jeremy as her fellow Instructor, my enthusiasm for a course wasn't as marked as usual. We arrived at the Centre on a Friday night, to be told that we would be going on a *Treasure Hunt* to find the weekend's venue. As was often the case, our car didn't have any petrol in it and Michael and I didn't know what we were going to do. Everything *meant* something, and we realised that if we didn't fulfil this Treasure Hunt quest, we wouldn't know where the venue was, and we'd miss out on the entire program. *What would that say about our relationship?*

We spent at least an hour trying to come up with a solution, eventually calling the local Burringbar service station owner at his home, begging him to meet us at the petrol station to fill our car with fuel. We lied and explained that our baby was ill and that we needed to get him to hospital. We were so desperate; we tried every manipulation we could think of (as we'd now been taught to). Miraculously, after our constant demands, he met us at the petrol station, and we filled up the car. We completed the hunt, following a map around the local area, finding clues which would lead us to the next treasure.

After several hours, we ended up at a small motel in Tweed Heads. The next day we were given numerous lectures on the human body, on various aphrodisiacal foods and on how to have sex in different positions for various purposes. For example, if we wanted to fall pregnant or if we couldn't reach orgasm, there were specific sexual positions that would cater to this. That night we were told we had to massage each other and perform a long, detailed bonding ritual before having sex with our partners. After working three jobs, the pressure of Natasha's weekly payments, and the previous months' nightmare, having sex with Michael was the last thing I wanted to do. It was a forced experience full of guilt and dread.

The following day we were given questionnaires about what we thought of our partners, both in general and in relation to sex. Natasha told us to be completely honest as we were not going to be sharing what we wrote. There were about ten sheets. At the end of the process, Natasha told us to hand over the sheets we had just filled out to our partners. I was horrified. *What the hell is Michael going to think of me now?*

The comment that Michael wrote about me that stood out the most, was that he didn't think he would end up with someone who was "fat".

I thought: *What?*

He had been very overweight in his past, more than I'd ever been, and I couldn't believe he was judging me for that.

~

After everything I had been through, when I closed my eyes, all I could feel was darkness inside me. My body was heavy,

my energy dense. Both Michael and I cut our hair short and dyed it blonde. We both looked like freaks. By lightening our hair, we were trying desperately to make ourselves *feel* lighter.

To help me escape my reality further, I began flirting with one of the regulars at the video shop. He was tall and dark, and he said he owned his own home at Tweed Heads. I liked the attention this man gave me, and it gave me a sense of freedom to flirt, some relief from the prison I felt I was trapped in at home and at Omaroo. He knew I had a partner and a child, but he continued to flirt with me and eventually invited me over to his house. Thoughts ran through my head of statements that Natasha had made on courses: 'If you cheat on your partner, don't tell them, as there is nothing to be gained from them knowing. You're only appeasing your own guilt.'

Once I'd accepted the invitation, there was no going back. I slept with him, convincing myself that I would not have to tell Michael. It was an awful experience. Despite this, I went over a second time. I woke up early one morning, got Sebastian ready for day-care and went over to the guy's house, hoping that somehow there would be a different outcome. There was not, of course.

Michael sensed that something strange was going on. I tried to convince myself that I didn't need to tell him the truth, but I was not someone who could keep secrets. Throughout my Integration process, I had wanted to purge all my thoughts and completely live my truth. I would blurt out every small thing about myself and my feelings during PMC, much to the chagrin of my fellow PMCs.

I couldn't live with myself, and within weeks, told Michael what I had done. He was shattered and became very angry and bitter. I begged his forgiveness, but naturally, he was too deeply hurt. Our innocence, and that of our relationship, disintegrated. Although we continued to live under the same roof, the tension between us was ever present.

Natasha commented that I had reverted to my old Patterning of filling any lightness I had achieved up to that point with black energy again (from that guy). As far as cheating on Michael was concerned, she added, 'I hope on some level, you weren't trying to copy me.'

Company Shares

I TURNED MY focus back on my commitment to Natasha and to Omaroo. At this point, Michael was still working for a Jim's Mowing business. It seemed financially lucrative, and when his boss wanted to sell the franchise, Michael thought it would be a good opportunity to buy it himself. For all intents and purposes Michael and I were still a couple, and we discussed the option with Natasha together. At first, she said 'Mick could never run his own business.'

She said he didn't have the experience or the follow-through to succeed. We considered her response, but Michael wanted to give the business a shot anyway, to see how much income he could create on his own. Soon Natasha retracted her original opinion and told him to borrow \$40,000 from the bank and offer his boss only \$10,000. Michael persuaded his father to sign as Guarantor on a business loan. Although his dad initially hesitated, he subsequently became convinced that the business' client base and capital would remain equity for the loan, if anything went wrong.

Around this time, Natasha needed to pay off her five or so credit cards which had reached their limits of around \$30,000 to \$50,000 each. She also had overdrafts of

approximately \$100,000 on some of her bank accounts. She came up with the idea of selling shares in Universal Knowledge (the company previously known as Life Integration Programmes, and more recently, Survivor Principles). She presented the concept to her loyal PMC students, claiming that by purchasing a share in the company, any benefits that the company might reap in the future would become theirs as well. This, she said, would be the reward for all our hard work and efforts. The price of a single share was \$20,000. Natasha described the investment as a tangible “asset”. The propaganda mill continued as we were told that we should invest *now*, as the offer would not be on the table again in the future.

I now decided that all the work I had put into the company for the last three years, and that I would obviously contribute to the future, was not going to go to waste. *There is no way I’m going to miss out on this opportunity!* I thought.

I convinced Michael that we had to be a part of this. I applied to my bank for a loan of \$10,000 and (somehow) my application was accepted. Michael contributed \$10,000 from the loan that he received for the Jim’s Mowing business. A total of twenty-one shares were sold at \$20,000 each, totalling \$420,000. A handful of PMC students bought two shares.

Although the shares were purchased in 2002, the Share Certificates were not handed out until 2004.

SHARE CERTIFICATE
UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE PTY LTD
A.C.N. 086 130 887

REGISTERED OFFICE: K B BUTLER CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT
SUITE 309, LEVEL 1, 87 GRIFFITH STREET, COOLANGATTA QLD 4225


CERTIFICATE NO:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT CARLI ANN MCCONKEY
OF UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE PTY LTD

Are Registered Holders of the Share (s) as shown in the panel herein in the above-named company,
subject to the Constitution thereof.

Number of Share (s)	Class of Share (s)	Distinctive Numbers		Amount Paid Per Share
		From	To	
1	ord			\$20,000

Executed for and on behalf of
UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE PTY LTD
by authority of the director(s) in the presence of:


Natasha Lakaev
Director
Dated: 15/12/02

NOTE:-This certificate must be given up to the Secretary on disposal of any or all of the above
Shares.

Universal Knowledge Share Certificate signed by
Natasha Lakaev, Director. Dated: 15/12/02

Partner Play

NATASHA WAS HAPPY. Her credit cards had been paid and she was still collecting her income protection insurance, visiting the doctor regularly to have the claim forms signed and herself deemed “unfit to work”. While Jeremy was doing PMC with the other five male students, Natasha had him working two jobs to help pay her bills. To satisfy Jeremy’s desire to run his own business, Natasha set up the company JJ Steel. She persuaded Ted, another current PMC ’02 member to become Jeremy’s business partner: Ted had trade skills over and above Jeremy, as well as a truck full of equipment worth around \$20,000. They acquired a contract to build and install awnings at the Enoggera Army Base building, which was a new development of onsite homes for the Army. At the same time, Ted began going out with Sarah, a Combined PMC member. Soon, pressure was put on Ted within the PMC group, due to Natasha accusing him of “playing games” with Sarah in their relationship, as well as other Issues (that were blown out of proportion). Ted ran away like others had before him, leaving all his equipment in the hands of Jeremy and Natasha.

At this point the rest of the guys on PMC '02 had to help Jeremy finish the contract within the specified timeframe. Between all of them, they had to help build and install the awnings in Brisbane, whilst at the same time juggling their full-time jobs, their PMC commitments, and their families. This meant even less sleep and dangerous driving between Burringbar and Brisbane almost daily. The awnings were built in the shed at Omaroo throughout the night and installed in Brisbane the following day. During this period, Natasha told us the story of how Jeremy had purposely swallowed some Round Up (poison) from the shed one day, which she laughed about, citing it as an 'act of attention-seeking.'

Soon after this incident, Jeremy ran away again, before the contract had been completed. Sometime later Ted took Natasha to court to recover his equipment and recoup a percentage of the contracts they had secured, as he had a 50:50 share in the company and had virtually set up the whole business. Natasha told each of the PMC guys to sign legal documents stating that they had been paid \$7,500 each in wages (which they had not) so she could present to the court the argument that there was no money left over from the business for Ted to lay claim to. She also included \$20,000 worth of consultancy fees to herself. In the end, the falsified wages meant that Ted did not regain any of his equity, nor existing or future income, as a partner. As far as Sarah was concerned, she had lost the love of her life, and was left to heal her aching heart.

During the period Jeremy was away, Natasha developed relations with Dave, Abigail's now ex-partner (after the head-shaving incident). Dave and Abigail had had a beautiful baby

son shortly before I did, which Natasha had helped deliver. According to Natasha, it was evident from events that year that Abigail was not good for Dave. ‘My Support Team convinced me to go out with Dave,’ Natasha told everyone. ‘It was *definitely not my idea*.’

Dave was tall, slim, and handsome, but best of all, he had a good job and was financially stable, contrary to most of the other men in the Group, who were working directly for Natasha for no pay. Natasha was still in Brisbane, and Dave moved in with her, helping pay rent and contributing to the general household. Within three or four months, Jeremy returned to the scene, and Dave was given the flick. Dave was extremely upset; not long afterward, he left the organisation completely. (But not before he was convinced to pay \$3,500 for the upcoming *The Survivors* program, which in the end he did not attend).

The Survivors

IN FEBRUARY 2003, Natasha announced that *The Survivors* program was going to be held for the first time in years. Natasha said it could be the last opportunity to do it, so we should find the money from *wherever* we could. This was the program that would teach us about all that we were working so hard to attain, the knowledge of how to survive through the Changes. We would participate in a weekend filled with theory, and then we would spend a week in the wilderness gaining practical experience. I asked my parents to help me pay for this crucial course.

During the weekend of theory in April, Natasha stated again that she, among very few, had the knowledge and experience to help a select group through Survival, which she said would take place in the near future. She stated, more specifically, that around 11 November 2011, that is, 11:11:11, the earth would experience environmental disasters and violence and that most of the world's population would perish. However, she claimed, with her as leader, our select group would be able to survive, by storing food sources and guns and being trained in survival skills. She told us that we would have to kill intruders who came onto the property scavenging for food before *they* killed *us*. She said that she was already prepared and that guns were buried on the property.

I was scared of this time, but I knew that I would have to do whatever it took to survive, for my children's sake, for their future, and for the safety of our group. We knew that Natasha had a great deal of knowledge about healing and natural medicine, so we were confident that we would have the necessary medicines at the ready for when disease broke out across the world. During this program, Natasha also told us she came from the Bird Tribes, who were Beings that were part of the sun and lived in another dimension. She maintained that she was unlike most people on earth, in that she remembered *all* her past lifetimes. She stated that her knowledge was channelled from Guides who told her what to do, what steps to take, and what was *really* going on when the media lied about events and people, including herself.

In stories years later, Natasha stated that post-Survival, Australia would become the World Power and that she would become a dominant figure in politics, perhaps even becoming the first female Australian Prime Minister. She also frequently alluded to the fact that she was the Queen of Atlantis. I once asked her who she thought I was in Atlantis: she replied, 'You were a Lady in Waiting.'

Whatever the true definition of that term may be, I took it to mean that I was her servant, and although I was disappointed at the time, I kept that belief firmly at the forefront of my mind.

As time moved on, the date for the end of the world became the 12th of December 2012, with no communication to any of us about the change. I simply saw a post-it-note on Natasha's bedside table, with the date scribbled in someone's large handwriting.

We undertook various activities on *The Survivors* weekend, including an orienteering exercise where we used a compass to navigate our way around the neighbourhood. We were taken to a gun range to learn how to shoot a rifle. The local karate teacher, who had taught Natasha's children when they were little, came to the course room to instruct us in self-defence. We also learnt how to build shelters and how to collect water from trees via the process of condensation overnight. At the end of the program, we were given a box of non-perishable food, and seeds which we were told were essential to grow, since eventually there would be no food left. I was fascinated by all the knowledge I had learned, and excited, yet daunted, at the prospect of the practical phase of the course.

~

For the upcoming week away, I was faced with trying to get time off work. I wasn't accustomed to simply asking for leave, which I was rightly entitled to. I had been working for Natasha full time without holidays for several years and I also knew that I couldn't admit to where I was going or what I would be doing. I figured that I would have to pretend I was sick. I arranged for my friend at work to cover for me: she was instructed to tell our boss, on the first day of the course, that I was too ill to come in, and that she would work in my place.

The experience of The Survivors program during the week away was incredible. As a group, we hiked up mountain

trails through beautiful rainforests, swam in freezing, running streams, and camped in tents under the moonlight. Natasha told us various stories about the Aborigines, as well as peoples from other times, worlds, and planets. She asked us to work out what job each of us would have during the time of Survival. Other members of the group chose things like Wood Collector, Fire Maker, Water Collector. I chose “Carer of Children”. It felt like we were all truly spiritually connected. We visited an area which we were told was an Aboriginal sacred site. We were told to choose an Australian animal and we enacted a corroboree where we sang and danced as the Aborigines would have. I danced as an emu.

On the last night, Natasha told us she believed there was a spy following us, a situation which was highly unexpected at that time of inward reflection. We hastily packed up our tents and moved out of the forest into the public campsite. The next day, before the coach arrived to take us home early, we enjoyed a last swim in some refreshing, sparkling water, with a beautiful waterfall as its backdrop.

Legal Play

WHEN I ARRIVED back at work on Monday morning, my boss told me I was fired. My friend had confessed that I had not been sick at all and had gone on the course. (This friend subsequently went on to become Store Manager). I told Natasha what had happened, and she said that I should sue my boss for Unfair Dismissal. I investigated the legalities of this, and having studied law subjects at university, I was somewhat familiar with the legal terms. I discovered I should have been given three warnings before I could be fired and thought I might have a good case. Any money I could claim, I reasoned, would help to pay off my debt to Natasha. I hired an old school friend's brother, a solicitor in Sydney, and held the hope firm in my mind that I could win \$25,000 in damages. This would complete the payments to Natasha, meaning Michael and I would finally be free from debt, which had been such a cumbersome weight on our shoulders.

From the outset, the solicitor and the senior partner said the best outcome I could hope for was \$8000. They said Unfair Dismissal cases rarely even reached that level of damages. I didn't tell them I disagreed with them and that I was determined to win \$25,000. The owner of the video shop

I was suing was actually an ex-lawyer managing her husband's family business. She ended up making a false statement about me in a witness document she produced, which I was able to prove untrue to the court. The Magistrate, armed with this knowledge, on top of learning that my boss had asked me to do some precarious duties such as debt collecting at particularly dangerous local caravan parks, awarded me my \$25,000!

In the end, I had had to represent myself in court, as the lawyers had said it was no longer financially viable for them to travel up for the case. I am sure they were astounded when I let them know I had achieved my goal in damages. I had to pay the law firm their fees which were around \$7000, but this was much less than I would have had to pay without *mate's rates*. So, after legal fees and tax, I was able to pay Natasha a lump sum of around \$13,000. Although it was not the end of our debt, I was grateful that we were saved about six months of payments.

~

Just before I left the video shop, I became friendly with a guy whose father owned the local service station, where he himself worked. I created a partnership with him whereby he would gain commission on renting the video store's movies to his customers. I would deliver the movies on my way home and collect them again every couple of days. I developed strong feelings for this man, and this time, decided to do the *right thing*: I told Michael that I wanted to separate from him. Again, he was heartbroken, but he remained living with me

due to our unfortunate circumstances (which would have been difficult) whilst I visited this guy for short timeframes whenever I could.

I felt so free and alive with this man, and he appeared to be financially stable (a trait I was strongly attracted to by this point), often talking about buying his own house very soon. I was also very attracted to him physically, which had not been the case with Michael, even at the beginning of our relationship.

After a few months, when Natasha was visiting Omaroo from Brisbane, I told her that I wanted to be with this man permanently. She said, 'I think you should put it on ice.'

I so wanted to be with him and escape my current reality. But I did as I was told.

Redemption

DURING 2003, THE ATO found Natasha's accounts to be fit and proper: no fines or charges would be laid. I was in the clear, and after losing my job at the video store, Natasha asked me to return to Omaroo to work for her. After feeling like such a failure and being ostracised the previous year, I was thrilled to be asked back and accepted once more into Natasha's inner circle. I secured a position at the Coolangatta cinema, just over the border in Queensland, to bring in some much-needed extra money. I worked there casually, later becoming a Duty Manager, for the next four years.

Around this point, Michael confided in Natasha that he wanted me back. Natasha advised him that by me working at Omaroo and living closer to the property it could be ensured that my thoughts didn't wander to any outside influences. She also convinced him that if he didn't want me to stray again, he needed to marry me, and quickly. Michael was determined to salvage our relationship, so he saved up and bought an engagement ring. When I arrived home one night from Omaroo, tired and mentally depleted, he proposed to me. We were sitting at the kitchen table with dirty dishes in the sink beside us and I was wearing old, worn-out clothes and daggy slippers. The atmosphere was anything but romantic. Michael

and I had not spent any quality time together in a *long* while, and I felt like I was only just starting to sort out my head over the past year's events. I waved my arm around the room, crying in a defeated voice: 'How can you ask me this *now*, like this?'

I declined his proposal.

Once this occurred, Natasha began to focus even more on Michael's inadequacies and his purported lack of power to save our relationship. She convinced him that he could only win me back with her input.

Upon Natasha's advice, we moved into another adjoining property that Natasha had just bought, 106 Hunter Street. It was a mud brick home, literally, made from mud. We were told the property had been owned previously by a Greens member of parliament who had used recycled building materials. It appeared he had built dodgy foundations, neglecting to cater for termite infestations; thus, the whole house was overrun with pests. Renting the property proved a disaster, leaving us helpless again and in low spirits. There was often a limited water supply in the property's tanks when it did not rain or when the pump in the creek stopped working, so Michael would have to either fix it or pay for loads of water to be brought in. The mud brick floor was breaking up. When Natasha saw this at Sebastian's third birthday party, she told us to fix it, the *entire* floor. We had to buy the appropriate mud, wet the floor, fill in the gaps, and smooth out the mud, tile by tile. We were also paying a high level of rent. This, coupled with the \$500 a week we were still paying to Natasha, again made us feel imprisoned by our situation. We wished we had never agreed to the tenancy.

With me working full-time and making only minimal income from the cinema, Michael had to carry most of the financial responsibility. As well as rent and our \$500 per week to Natasha we were also spending money on property maintenance costs for Omaroo: Natasha made us pay for virtually everything for the property. She was readily using the excuse that we were all now *shareholders*. Michael paid for the petrol for the lawn mowers, straw and feed for the chickens, and extra tools and equipment he needed which he either purchased or hired. After taking out the money for these auxiliary costs there was little left over for our own expenses: food, petrol, and bills. The realisation that we were stuck in another *hell hole* with no freedom and no likelihood of escaping Omaroo struck us again.

Michael began working two to four jobs at a time, working upwards of twenty hours a day. He was rarely at home, sleeping mostly in his car on the road between jobs. His timetable at one point was working seven mornings a week from 4am cleaning toilets and barbecues at Hinze Dam, then travelling to Hope Island where he cleaned a tavern for three hours, after which he worked his Jim's Mowing business for the remainder of the day. Finally, he worked packing shelves at Woolworths until midnight or 2am. Over Michael's nine years of involvement with Natasha and working on her property, Michael had seven car accidents in which he was almost killed or seriously injured due to chronic driver's fatigue. I know of several other car accidents of fellow PMCers while driving to a course.

The negativity of our situation was always counter argued with the hope of better things to come. We would

never reach the stage where we wanted to permanently leave LIP, because we wholeheartedly believed in Natasha's prophesy of enlightenment and Survival. One activity that helped take our minds off things was when Natasha commenced an exercise program called *Regime Busters*. Most of the Combined PMC Group participated – at a cost – and we would meet with the group two or three times a week for runs around the Brisbane River, sit-ups and push-ups, and the occasional Rock-Climbing session. This would mean that all those who lived in Northern NSW would carpool up to Brisbane in the afternoon (a ninety-minute trip) and once we'd finished the workout, we'd drive back home. Despite the excessive travel and time waste, it kept us all fit and enabled us to feel lighter for at least some moments of our otherwise gruelling existence. It was also an opportunity for Natasha to make more money, offload work to those in the office, and keep a constant close eye on everyone.

Travel

IN THE MIDDLE of 2003, Natasha announced that she and Jeremy were getting married. The wedding was to be held in September at a Church in Brisbane; the reception was to take place on South Stradbroke Island (off the Brisbane coast). Everyone was excited to have an event to look forward to, a chance to escape our daily grind for two days at an island resort. With the little money we had spare, we all paid for transport and accommodation for the weekend away. The preparations were enormous, as everything had to be perfect. Natasha had everyone, and I mean *everyone*, doing some form of organisation, from sewing her dress, to producing the invitations, to creating all the decorations for the tables and chairs. It was a massive production and we all had to spend a lot of time and our own money in the process.

They went on their honeymoon to the South Pacific Island of Samoa. News came back afterwards that once Jeremy had Natasha all on his own, he had “bashed the shit out of her” on their first night. On their return, Natasha raved on and on about the event, relating *her* version of events. They continued to function together as a couple, even as this physical abuse became a regular occurrence. Only this time,

it had been Natasha getting beaten up, not Jeremy, in an isolated place away from the Group.

On the home front, Alice (who had a young daughter and was now separated from her husband, Dominic) had been stationed in Brisbane, fulfilling her role as Natasha's PA, Accounts Coordinator, Office Manager, Nanny, Cleaner and Cook. She was now transferred down to Omaroo for a while as she was In The Shit for not completing her jobs properly. Natasha told her to move into 106 with Michael and me. We were disappointed to lose our privacy, but thankful for the reduced financial burden of full rent. Around this time, my old flatmate Abigail left unexpectedly with her young son and dropped out of contact with everyone.

~

Michael was becoming more and more chronically depressed, carrying the hurt from my past actions. Due to his long hours working, he saw even less of Sebastian and myself. Unbeknownst to me, he began going to the movies to escape and would catch up on sleep during his Jim's Mowing timeslot. Soon his regular clients dwindled away, and the business became fruitless. He wanted to sell the franchise – however, in the end, it became worthless as he no longer had a saleable client base. I blamed him for ruining our chances of selling the business and recouping some money for the future house we dreamed of. *Blame* was my gut reaction, without taking into consideration the emotional and psychological toll our life had taken on him.

Nevertheless, in December 2003 I became pregnant. Again, it was deemed by those close to us as an “immaculate conception”. In reality, we didn’t have time to think about it too much; we simply trudged on, working through Christmas and the New Year. Like all the years before, and all those after, we only ever had celebratory days off like Christmas Day, Boxing Day (if we were lucky), New Year’s Day and Easter Sunday. Every other day was work as usual, including weekends and other public holidays. Typically, at celebratory events, I would spend the first portion crying in the bathroom, as I had rushed from work to home, changed quickly, looked like a dishevelled mess, and was unable to prepare any decent food to share. Once I’d had a good cry, I came out and enjoyed myself as much as I could with everyone else, drinking alcohol and sharing jokes until Natasha told me I was being too loud and to stop drinking.

~

Another PMC group commenced, called PMC ’04, and they were a dedicated cohort, who stuck to their regime and had a group leader who kept them in line. There were about twelve on the program, including Harriette, a mother of three and wife to a Brisbane-based lawyer, and Isabelle, a young woman from Western Australia who now lived in Byron Bay. A friend of Isabelle’s, Ben, originally from Sydney, had also signed up. It was the beginning of another era of new students.

Bolstered by this injection of funds into Universal Knowledge, Natasha, in April, took a group of those in her inner circle over to Thailand. There were about four couples,

including Jeremy and herself. It soon surfaced that Jeremy had allegedly been bribed by his mother to leave Natasha, for something like \$30,000. His mother had given him the money before he left and halfway through the holiday, Natasha discovered it. He had run away once more, this time never to be seen again.

Natasha came back and told us the whole story, saying that Jeremy had married her thinking he would be able to claim half of her fortune. She said she was glad that he had gone, and that she had only married him because she knew it would be the end of all the trouble between them for good. For years to come, Natasha would frequently lament that Jeremy was the *love of her life*, *more* than Phillip, *more* than Luke, *more* than *all* the others. She also said, ‘I had the best sex of my life with Jeremy. Although he was mostly a prick, he was sensational in bed.’

Not long afterward, Natasha decided to travel to South America. She took Sarah with her, who had been left behind without Ted – this was Natasha’s way of helping her move on. Whilst over there, Natasha met a South American man named Victor, whom she later attested to be another of her *soulmates*. She said he was a Shaft or side-line of Jeremy’s. She showed us pictures of Victor and his cousin, with whom Sarah had also had a brief affair. Natasha came back raving about these men and their sexual prowess.

This trip to South America was the beginning of Natasha’s affiliation with the country and her later desire to potentially leave Australia and escape there in Survival.

The Initiates

IN JUNE 2004, we moved out of 106 into a beautiful townhouse in Pottsville. Dominic had recently moved in with his wife Alice again, and it became impossible for us all to live together. Michael and I had actually demanded to leave this time, as the situation had become unbearable with the four of us. Luckily, we were given permission to leave, and once we were out of there, we felt *somewhat free*. The new townhouse was a far cry from 106, and a big step up from the unit we had previously lived in at Pottsville, during our year off from working at Omaroo.

I was still doing an enormous load of work in the office and barely saw Michael. Despite this, we booked ourselves into *Freedom in Relationships Stage 2* later that month. Luke was now instructing alongside Natasha and was her suspected partner again now that Jeremy had left. I was heavily pregnant and exhausted. I was careful in what I wrote on the questionnaire regarding my true feelings about Michael, as this time I knew it would be shared.

~

Not long after this, we were informed of another course we needed to complete. Natasha told us it was time to reach the

highest level of our Integration and do *The Initiates*. It was the program I had promised myself at the end of *The Next Evolutionary Step* so many years before, that I would work my way towards. When we excitedly stepped into the classroom to learn even more amazing Laws of the Universe, one of the first instructions Natasha gave us was to lie on the floor and not to move until she got back. I lay there thinking, *I need to go to the toilet, but I can't, I need to move (some part of) my body but I can't*.

I knew this was a test and if I didn't pass it, I wouldn't become fully Integrated. Natasha repeated the directive a number of times over the two-day program and each time it felt like four or five hours before Natasha came back up from her house to tell us we could move.

At the completion of the course, we had to gather in the garden behind the Centre, and Natasha came out dressed in a white flowing dress covered with a long, white robe. She told us she was "one of twelve members on the Intergalactic Council of the Universe" and gave each of us a silver pendant engraved with a star and the words "Initiates 2004".

That was the sum-total process for the *highest level* of enlightenment. I didn't feel ripped off at the time, as I was too dulled from years of pain to question it.

~

One Saturday night at a Combined *Personal Mastery* Meeting in the Centre, I was feeling particularly vulnerable and deflated. I had been babysitting everyone's kids that day as I was heavily pregnant and had been allocated to do so. As we

all sat around in a circle, Alice started the Issues session by stating ‘I have an issue with the way the kids were handled today. There was scatteredness all through it. All the kids were fucked up with their sleeping due to their bedtimes. It’s a reflection of what Sebastian’s life is like, no regular routine or bedtime. It completely throws them out for the day.’

Natasha replied, ‘Your expectations are completely unrealistic. You’re idiotic to put Carli in a position of control with other children’s lives. If you think Carli is competent enough to look after someone’s future, you’re mad. We’re still cleaning up the mess in the office, it’s been years now. I don’t understand why you would.’

Natasha turned to me. ‘God knows the level of damage you and Michael have done to Sebastian.’

Then back to Alice: ‘you don’t let some fucking idiot experiment with them.’

‘I want an explanation,’ Alice asked me, ‘why you weren’t doing their proper sleep times when you knew?’

I defended myself. ‘I asked Heather if I should put down Patrick the same time as Helen. I was trying to get them all down at the same time.’

‘This afternoon, you weren’t anywhere to be seen and all the babies were crying,” Heather shot back accusingly.

‘For what reason?’ Natasha asked. ‘Give the kids you’ve got the best you can offer them. They’re LIP kids, what are you doing?’

‘You don’t stick to a routine with Seb,’ Dominic interjected. ‘Some nights he’s been up so late I’m stunned. You’re feeding him at 11pm.’

Natasha pointed to my stomach. ‘You and Michael chose to have another child... Well, I think it was a stupid decision.’

I began to cry. ‘Why am I so fucked-up? Why do I have to be this way? I’m fucking useless!’

Everyone started laughing.

‘It’s not funny. I know I’m fucking up Seb.’

‘She’s daddy’s little girl,’ said Natasha, before zeroing in on me again. ‘This high-pitched whining irritates me. Don’t dump on me. I have good reason to be annoyed. You can’t just reverse out and leave this place.’

‘I don’t understand what you’re carrying on about,’ she continued. ‘You chose a second child and I believe your reason is because you want to stay at home and not work. It has nothing to do with expanding the family; it’s an excuse not to work. These are all the wrong reasons for a second child.’

‘Especially when you know you’re doing a fucked-up job with Seb,’ Alice added. ‘Why would you have another child?’

‘I did want to have another child so Seb would have a sibling,’ I argued. ‘That’s what I believe. I know what you’re saying about the work thing – I did eventually want to work from home, doing healings or working on the computer or something.’

‘It’s about realising who and what you are,’ said Natasha. ‘Until then you can’t make a shift. It’s so basic. I’m getting really frustrated.’

She took a deep breath and sighed. ‘Can we get real here? You’re nearly nine months pregnant, fat, and overweight. The baby will pop out quickly, you’ll have two kids, Michael will sleep in the car, and you’ll be financially destitute. Your cars are fucked, and if you don’t work, they’ll

break down and you'll have to hitch a ride with a child on one hip and the other in your hand. Face it, Carli, this is your lot. Think about contraception very deeply. What are you doing? Of course, while your head isn't functioning, you'll be an idiot. Dead brain equals idiotic actions, functioning brain equals intelligent actions. If I remember correctly, I said no matter what, don't lose that cinema job. Are you and Michael planning to keep working after you've finished up this financial stuff?

'Being realistic,' I said, 'I was going to apply for the full-time job that came up at work. We had an older lady we paid \$25 a day to look after Sebastian last year. We may be able to find someone similar who's willing to look after them both.'

Natasha changed tact. 'It's not Michael's fault you have made a mess of your relationship. Work out what you're going to do about fixing it. I don't agree with Michael's behaviour, leaving you this pregnant with Seb, and when you need things, he doesn't come and help you – I can imagine your devastation when this happens.'

I buried my face in my hands. 'I'm all alone, because he doesn't care either... then thinking that you guys don't care...'

'You've burnt bridges with both parents, and all creditors,' Natasha concluded. 'You have to look at what you're doing. You and Michael are both very capable of working your butts off and pay all your bills by the end of the year and have a home deposit. You're both ingenious when it comes to getting work; there is no reason to go without.'

From the previous thirty minutes' myriad of Issues, I sat with a melting pot of emotions and my brain scrambled, as I

often did during these sessions. I focused on the last positive note left by Natasha. Once more I knew there was hope of a brighter future with Michael and our children... *As long as we both continued to work our butts off.*

Jacob

BY EARLY AUGUST when my second son, Jacob, was due, Michael was working in the office of a furniture company during the day and at a 24-hour convenience store on the Gold Coast through the night. On his one full day off I would cover for him to protect him from Natasha, ensuring he caught up on his lack of sleep from the rest of the week. Leading up to Jacob's birth I was rushing around as usual, and one day I tripped over a child gate on the Centre deck. I landed on my stomach. I asked Natasha if I should go to the hospital to get it checked out. 'Yes,' she said. 'You should go, just to be on the safe side.'

When the doctor examined me, he said it would be best for me to stay overnight to ensure there were no complications. I was delighted with the opportunity to have one night of peace and quiet with just me and my baby inside me. As I lay between the clean, white sheets, for the first time in a long while, I felt calm and content.

~

Natasha recommenced her Graduate Diploma of Psychology at Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

and gave me CDs full of lectures and tutorials she had recorded in class. I had to type them up verbatim so that she could study the notes for exams and complete assignments. She also asked some of us to type up highlighted sections from her textbooks. A project she worked on, later became known as the Lakaev Academic Stress Response Scale (LASRS; Lakaev, 2006).

I was working hard trying to finish typing up one of Natasha's CDs on the night I went into hospital to have Jacob. I was typing incessantly as my contractions became closer and closer. While Natasha lay in bed, asleep, I yearned for her to be by my side in hospital, like last time with Sebastian. She had said to both Michael and I leading up to this birth: 'You don't really want me there this time, do you?'

Although I absolutely did, I did not admit my neediness to her. She later told me it was Michael who had convinced her not to attend as he had said he wanted to have me all to himself. Michael insisted he didn't say such a thing. I relied on Janet, a senior Instructor, to advise me when to go to hospital as she was in the office with me going over some course curriculums. When I felt I had completed all that I needed to (so that by chance I could have some days off after Jacob was born) I began to gather my things.

Michael was at work at the convenience store, and no one could take over his shift until it finished at 5am. So Julian, the partner of Jenny, who was a senior Instructor and one of Natasha's best friends, drove me to the hospital. I sent him home before too long, as I didn't want him to have to wait around with me. I was by myself, and I was trying to keep my anxiety at bay. My last experience giving birth had been

excruciatingly painful and I didn't think I could do it again, that is, *literally give birth*. When Michael arrived at 6am I was relieved, but I was scared without Natasha by my side. I was also confronted with the decision of whether to take two capsules of Disprin, which the doctors told me I had to ingest as I had some sort of infection that could be passed onto the baby. Knowing I was not supposed to take any drugs, I didn't know what to do. With immense guilt, I swallowed the Disprin hoping that I would not be ruining my son's chances at a *pure life*.

Jacob's birth was traumatic with only Michael (fatigued as he was with no sleep the night before) and me there to deal with it. I was so frightened that I wouldn't have the strength to push him out, but after what felt like forever and agonizing pain, Jacob came out at ten pounds two ounces. He was *big*. I was in hospital for a day, at home for another day, and just like last time, I was called straight back into work. I was told by Natasha that if I was at home too long, my Patterns of being "depressed and lazy" would come out and it would be hard for me to get back into the workflow again.

In the office, I was not eating properly as usual, and felt I wasn't producing enough milk. However, this time Jenny was working in the office with me, and because she gave birth to a son one month after myself – and took time out to feed – so did I.

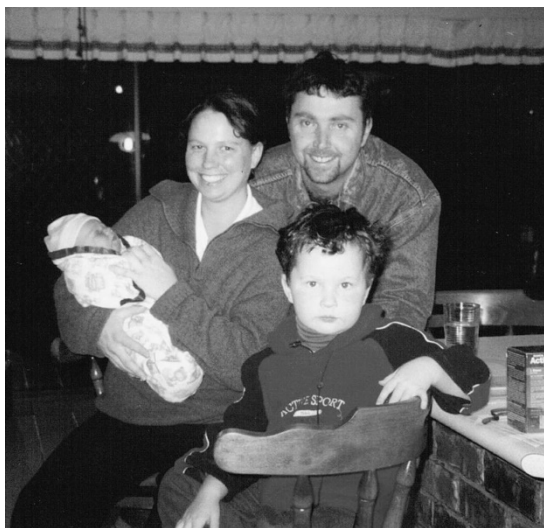
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In October, Natasha said we would be running *The Final Step* program at Omaroo, as there weren't enough people enrolled in the course to warrant travelling to and paying for the Glen

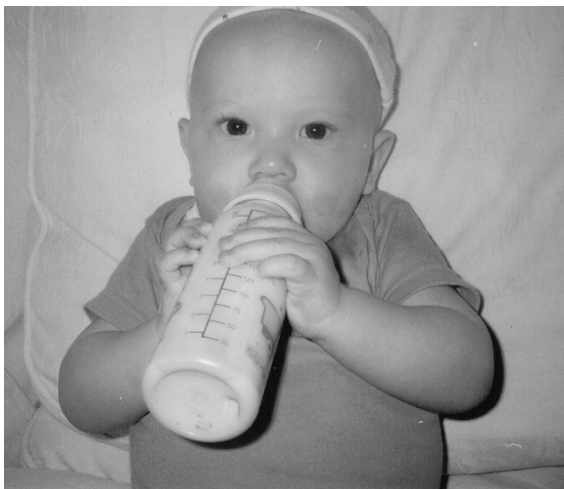
Innes property. Because Jenny and I were on the Support team, we were told by Natasha that we had to buy baby formula, and that whoever was looking after the children would feed the babies milk from a bottle. Jenny and I were devastated. The fact that breast-feeding Sebastian had been taken off me without my consent left me completely distraught. I knew this meant the end of me breast-feeding Jacob. He was only two months old. I tried to relish the last few days before the course started.

Because I was part of Camp Security, I couldn't see Jacob the whole week. The children were cared for in the office and I was out on the property twenty-four hours a day, dressed in army green camouflage clothing. With little sleep, we had to keep our eyes on the students so that they wouldn't escape or get hurt. We also had to watch out for any media in case they were there to spy on us again.

As I predicted, after the program Jacob no longer wanted to breastfeed.



In Natasha's Kitchen on the Way Home from
Hospital with Jacob



Jacob Drinking his Bottle of Milk

Sleep Deprivation

BY NOVEMBER, THE \$70,000 I owed Natasha was finally paid off. I went to a lot of trouble to make sure that every single payment was accounted for, checking all my payments against Jenny's records. Jenny was now handling the accounts. I discovered I'd actually overpaid by just under a thousand dollars.

Towards Christmas it became evident to Natasha that Jenny had now stuffed up the accounts. After helping in cleaning up my Mess in 2002, Jenny had now done the exact same thing by not chasing Tax Invoices (that Natasha had failed to collect herself). I was asked to help Jenny clean up the Mess, and we spent hours through the night sorting out which Tax Invoices were missing.

On Christmas Eve, the kids and I were allowed to go home to Pottsville to get ready for Christmas Eve Dinner, the traditional event that Natasha held in her home each year. We were allocated dishes to cook and alcohol to bring, and we would all come for dinner, sleep in the Centre, and the next morning, take the kids down to Natasha's house to open the presents that Santa had brought. On the drive home, however, I blacked out. I woke up to the sound of us crashing into the side of a hill, and clothes that had been sitting in a basket on

Sebastian's lap in the front seat were flung across the windscreen. Jacob was in the back of the car in a baby seat. I had not realised how tired I was.

The car was a write off. I was so grateful that we had not been killed. A man in a white van pulled over and offered to take us home. We pulled everything out of the car and loaded it into the back of his van. When we arrived home, as usual, I was in autopilot. Michael was at work so I called and asked Janet, who was travelling down from Brisbane, to pick us up on her way through. I continued to get us ready without a single pause to digest what had just happened. Within hours I was back at Omaroo, children in tow, ready to celebrate one of the only nights we had off in the year.

~

On the 31st of January 2005, Michael was working at the convenience store and was held up at knifepoint. The masked robber asked him for all the money in the till and demanded that he open the safe in his boss' office, to give him the rest of the night's takings. Michael told him that he didn't have the key to the office. The robber persisted in demanding the key but luckily Michael convinced him he was telling the truth. The shop owner had neglected to tell Michael where the emergency buzzer alarm was – under the counter – for when incidents like this occurred. He narrowly escaped what could have been a fatal outcome. The police came and questioned Michael for about three hours. Once they had gone, he asked his boss if he could go home. His boss appeared resentful and told him, 'Fine, go home', finishing the shift for him. The next

day his boss called and said not to come in. He said the guy who Michael had been replacing for six months was now coming back to work and that Michael was no longer required.

Natasha found out about the incident and advised Michael: ‘You should lodge a Work Cover insurance claim and get all that you can out of him.’

Michael was successful in his claim, and this meant that the business had to pay for both his day job’s loss of wages and those of his night job. Work Cover stipulated that he would be required to see a psychologist and that he was entitled to the payments until the psychologist deemed him fit to return to work. Within a week of Michael taking time off for the first time in years, Natasha said for me to ‘get him working or he’s going to become lazy. Tell him he has to work here and do the property maintenance.’

Thus, Michael commenced working at Omaroo full-time.

~

Natasha managed to secure another solid group of students onto *Personal Mastery* 2005, or PMC ’05. Half the group was made up of Combined PMCs doing the course for the second time. Natasha had persuaded them that because they were still having Issues in their lives, that they were not yet Integrated. They therefore needed to do the PMC process *again*. There was an Instructors program held that same year and Natasha convinced around eight people that it was their next integral step. The Instructors program cost around \$15,000. During this three-month Instructor’s program, Ben

from Byron Bay, who had dated Rebecca (Michael's fellow PMCer from 2002) at the beginning of the year, allegedly spent hours and hours of everyone's time convincing Natasha to go out with him. According to Natasha, he wrote a three-page list of all the skills he had with which he could help Natasha with her businesses and on her property. In other words, he would be an asset to her financially, as well as personally, as her partner. By the end of the program, they were a couple. Ben taught Natasha to surf, and they went out surfing almost every day, while everyone else stayed at the property doing hard labour outside or running the office. Secretly, everyone was jealous that Ben didn't have to lift a finger while we all ran around like idiots.

~

As PMC '05 progressed, the group's inner workings became a favoured talking point. A couple of the students weren't keeping up with the 10km runs every day, and unlike previous years when a student had to run 20km the next day if they missed the day before, everyone in the group was now made to run the extra 10km as well. It became a debacle, as the whole group, at one point, had about 20 runs to catch up on. Natasha told us there were Issues within the group about Rebecca, who was now going out with Harvey, the leader of the PMC '05 group. We were told she had borrowed money from Harvey and other PMC members to pay for some of her courses, and she was allegedly one of the culprits not doing her runs. Rebecca's sister was getting married overseas and the group told her she was not allowed to go, as Natasha

always stipulated that you couldn't do anything outside of the PMC process until it was completed. Rebecca was left reeling with the powerlessness she felt at not being able to attend her only sister's wedding.

Not long after, it came to light that Natasha had caught Rebecca and Ben flirting. Natasha was *furious*. She didn't want to believe that a partner of *hers* was flirting with his ex-girlfriend. Natasha ridiculed Rebecca in front of everyone and began the process of destroying Rebecca's credibility within the group.

Matters became drastically worse when Natasha chastised Rebecca in a Combined PMC meeting one night and told her that she had to write and sign a document stating that she was a liar and a con artist. She had to list all the money she owed and describe how she had manipulated Harvey and the rest of PMC '05. Natasha asked two PMC members to sit next to her until the letter was completed and signed. Then Natasha threw her off the property.

Being expelled out of PMC had only ever happened once before, to a young woman Natasha had deemed "bad news" in PMC 2004. Rebecca was devastated, and scrambled to save her relationship with Harvey, but he was told to kick her out onto the street. It was very difficult for Rebecca on the outside, as at first, she still believed in Natasha and her teachings, and understood it to be entirely her own fault that she had been excommunicated.

Marriage

MICHAEL WAS STILL determined to marry me. By Valentine's Day 2005, he had bought another ring and took me to the Sheraton Mirage on the Gold Coast for a seafood buffet dinner and a night at the five-star hotel. It was a beautiful occasion, and such a treat away from everything at Omaroo. This time I said 'yes'.

We told everyone the news. I said we weren't going to rush into actually getting married, but Natasha insisted that we do so as soon as possible. She was determined to get me reined in so that my focus would remain on her and Omaroo. We told our parents the news, and they were shocked when informed that we were getting married in three months' time.

I went into overdrive planning the wedding, as did Natasha, as she was due to fly to South America once more in March, returning just before the wedding. I asked Natasha to help me make some decisions about the wedding, including choosing the venue, the wedding dress, and the clothes for the bridal party. She asked who I was going to have as my bridesmaids, and I suggested Alice and Kate.

'You don't really want *them*, do you?'

They were both In The Shit at the time – which is probably why I felt closer to them than anyone else – and Natasha persuaded me that it wasn't the right thing to do. Hesitantly, I asked Natasha if she would consider being my Matron of Honour, to which she surprisingly agreed. I chose another girl as my Bridesmaid, Tiffany, who I wasn't especially friends with. Natasha said she would take me shopping for my dress, about which I felt very honoured. I couldn't believe she would go to *that much trouble*. On our way up to Brisbane, I was extremely nervous as I sat in the car next to her. I didn't know what to talk about. It was in these times, one on one, that confusingly, Natasha appeared quite *normal*.

We walked into the first bridal shop, and Natasha made all the decisions. She selected a long, cream skirt and a cream and brown beaded bodice. When I tried them on, she said they looked perfect. She insisted there was no need to continue searching. We then went to David Jones, and she chose outfits for herself and Tiffany that she thought would match the brown hues of my dress, including knee-high brown boots. She also found a brown fake fur wrap for my shoulders. It was all very non-traditional, but I thought Natasha was the best judge. We weren't conventional in anything we did anyway.

My mother and father paid for most of the wedding, even though they didn't have any input into it; they just knew they were invited. In preparing for the wedding, I tried my hardest to be organised, as I balanced this with my other office tasks. I wrote lists of exactly what Michael and I had to do and crossed off the tasks as I completed them. But as we got closer to the wedding day, Natasha's new Office Manager, Margaret,

told me about all the other things I had forgotten about. Margaret had recently moved down to Burringbar from Brisbane and had married her husband the year before. Inwardly I resented Margaret's organisational skills and felt like a failure as she took over the rest of our wedding planning.

~

The hen's and buck's parties were held the night before the wedding as Natasha had only just flown back from South America. We all rented cabins at the Byron Bay resort where the wedding was to take place. There was loads of alcohol and loud music, and although the guys and girls started off separately, we combined midway through and had fun dancing until late.

I was slightly hungover when I woke up, and in fine LIP form, went for a quick run so that I could be fresh and clear-headed for the day. When I got back to my cabin, I was told by one of the girls, Rachel, that Natasha's wedding present to me was to send me to get a Brazilian wax. I had heard Natasha describe her waxing exploits on numerous occasions and I knew that a Brazilian was a full wax in the entire pubic region. I had never had any waxing done before and I didn't know what to expect. When I got to the local beauty salon, the beautician asked me whether I wanted a full Brazilian or if I wanted to leave anything. I had no idea what she was talking about and assumed I was meant to have the full job done, which I expressed. Rachel told the woman that I was due to get married that morning, so she had to be quick. She said she would use wax strips. I was petrified when I felt the first rip

and numb by the time she finished. I sat in shock as Rachel drove me back to the wedding venue (after paying for the treatment herself, of course).

Before the wedding ceremony everyone had planned to have their children “baptised” in a Naming Ceremony. Natasha had told us that if she became all the children’s Godmother, then they would *automatically* be metaphysically under her protection and would make it through the Changes in Survival. I had planned to have my friend, Vanessa, from Bondi, be godmother to Sebastian, and had already asked her – but when Natasha made this important statement, I had to change my decision. It was in our best interest to have Natasha as Godmother, and as recommended by her as well, to have her three sons as all the children’s Godfathers. I lost contact with Vanessa after this, as I was too embarrassed to tell her.

As everyone gathered for photos after the Naming Ceremony, my mother overheard Natasha telling everyone she had booked me in for a Brazilian wax as her wedding present. As Natasha recounted the story to us later that night, she sounded gleeful as she described the look of horror on my mother’s face.

~

There were some aspects of the Wedding Day that did not go according to plan. There were instructions that I had written down but not passed onto others, for example, in regard to how the children should be looked after, which was pointed out to me as an Issue. Ben had forgotten to bring Natasha’s newly purchased classic car down to Byron Bay, so he had to

go back to collect it; therefore, the wedding started around an hour late. Then, when I was about to walk down the aisle with my father, my mother ran up to me and said: 'I'm going to walk down the aisle with you.'

I was aghast at my mother's request. *After all my mother has done to me in my life*, (as Natasha regularly reminded me,) *I'm not going to have her walk me down the aisle!*

'No, mum,' I said. 'It's dad's job, not yours.' My mother retreated with tears in her eyes and her head hanging down.

After the ceremony, the wedding party made its way to the beach to take photos while everyone else helped set up in the reception area. I had arranged for those from LIP to be intermingled with our relatives, but apparently, Natasha instructed Margaret and Sarah to rearrange the placenames so that LIP members were all sitting at the same tables near the front and our families sat at the back.

It had been raining for three weeks straight leading up to the wedding and the skies had only cleared that morning. I thanked the Universe for the beautiful day it had given us. Due to the clouds and dark sky, the photos were magnificent.

During the Reception, I made a big effort to go up to each relative and say 'thankyou' for coming all the way from Sydney and interstate. None of my old school or university friends had been able to make it at such short notice, or so they told me. According to many of our relatives I've since spoken to, the day was very *weird*. They said Natasha appeared arrogant and domineering, and none of my relatives felt like they were included or belonged. Michael's mother later commented that it seemed like I was *marrying Natasha, not Michael!* Despite all these things, the day in my memory was a beautiful one.



My Parents at our Wedding



The Bride and Matron of Honour

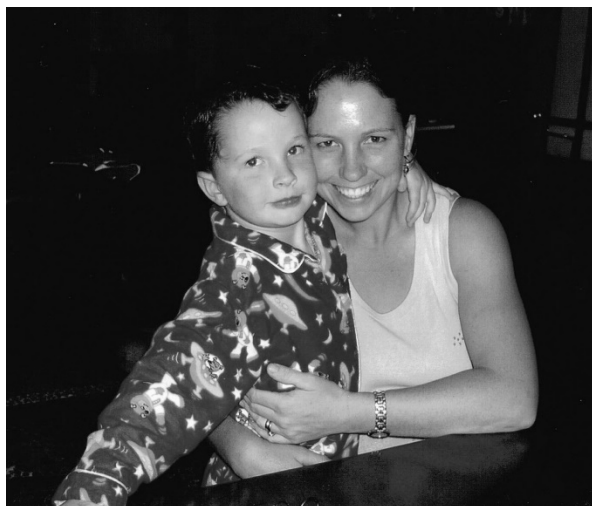
Michael and I went for our honeymoon at Port Douglas in North Queensland while my parents looked after Sebastian and Jacob in Sydney. We barely had any money so Natasha had told us to put on the invitation: “instead of presents, please give some cash for the honeymoon”. I felt so embarrassed at us doing this, as if we were begging paupers. With what money we were given, we managed to eat out once at a restaurant and went on a couple of excursions including a boat trip to the Great Barrier Reef.

The honeymoon didn't turn out the way Michael had expected. Instead of staying in the hotel room all day doing what most couples do on their honeymoon, all I wanted to do was sleep. I was so nervous, and my body was tense. We had not spent much time together leading up to the wedding. In reality, we had not spent a lot of time together over the previous five years. Michael became withdrawn and while I slept, he drowned his sorrows drinking alcohol.

A week was not enough time to relax and rejuvenate after what we had been through, and before we knew it, we were back in Sydney picking up our boys.



Sebastian and Jacob Enjoying Time in Sydney with
Their Grandparents



Sebastian and me in Sydney

Lost in Paradise

LEADING UP TO the wedding, uncharacteristically, Natasha had organised a trip to Samoa for some of us who had been working hard at Omaroo, including myself and Michael. We were also hoping to take Sebastian. The holiday was planned for the week immediately following our honeymoon. Natasha said it would be paid for by the business and I was so excited to be going away on a tropical holiday: finally, a reward from Natasha. Plans changed, however, when Natasha told us that she was only going to pay for our flights (using her frequent flyer points) and that we would each have to pay for accommodation and expenses. Because we couldn't afford for the three of us to go, only I was booked to travel.

At the airport, Michael gave me the only money he had left in his bank account, around \$500, and told me to have a great time. Before he left, I heard Michael say to Natasha, 'Take care of her.'

'I will', she replied. 'Yes, she needs a break.'

Wow, I thought. Natasha realises how hard I've been working, and she doesn't hate me for the past! I have finally made up for everything I have done to her!

The group consisted of myself, Julian (Jenny's partner); Dominic (Alice's partner); Eric (Sasha's partner) and their daughter; Heather and Roger, who were expecting a baby; and Natasha and her two youngest sons, Henry, and Timothy. Except for Heather and Roger, everyone else's partners were left behind because they were In The Shit. Natasha's partner, Ben, was also absent. With the meagre \$500 in my pocket for the weeklong trip I didn't know how I was going to survive. Everyone bought food while we were waiting for the flight, but I didn't buy anything. I didn't know how much everything was going to cost once we reached Samoa.

When we arrived, the country was exquisite. Natasha had told us it was one of the most untouched places in the world, and it was. Palm trees were strewn across the island; the beaches had soft, white sand; the ocean was crystal blue. It truly was paradise. The daytrip excursions we took were unlike anything I had ever experienced. We visited waterfalls with stunning waterholes, we swam with giant turtles, we visited the remains of an erupted volcano, and we heard folklore stories from the locals. The food was amazing. We ate fresh fish each day and local fruit and vegetables grown in the resort's gardens. Pigs and chickens ran freely in the streets. On Sundays, the locals would wear all white and attend Church; we could hear them singing hymns. We felt like we were in another world, somewhere so different from the stress and captivity of Omaroo.

Due to uneven number of males and females, Natasha allocated for Julian and me to sleep in the same room. Most rooms only had a double bed, so we had to sleep together. For the first few nights Natasha would retreat to her bungalow

early with her children. She cited sickness as the reason. This gave me the opportunity to drink with the others and get tipsy, telling jokes with the group. I enjoyed making them laugh. It enabled me to feel free to be myself without Natasha around putting me down. As the nights wore on and the days became more fun-filled, Julian and I started flirting with each other. I welcomed the electricity between us, which I had not experienced for so long. Eventually we started spooning in bed, but with the possibility to take it further, we didn't step over the line.

One night we were dancing with the locals and Natasha was dancing with one of the young, Samoan men. I thought one of the other men who worked at the hotel was cute, and that it would be nice to dance with him too. I went up to Natasha to ask her permission. 'You're on holidays!' She exclaimed. 'You can do whatever you want!'

I thought – *Natasha's dancing with a man while Ben is at home working* – and it was obvious that she was going to sleep with him as she had done with the men in South America. *Ok*, I thought. *I'll just dance with him and maybe have a kiss.*

After we danced for a while, the young man asked me to go for a walk. I went with him, heading away from the crowd. He led me to one of the huts, and once inside started taking off my clothes. I soon found myself commencing to have sex with him, but very quickly, I came to my senses and cried: 'Stop, I can't! I've just been *married!*'

'I don't care.'

'I do!'

I scrambled to get dressed and ran back to my room. I felt wretched and cruel. *What is wrong with me?* I thought. *How could I do such a thing to Michael – again?*

I had been married for less than three weeks.

I confided in Natasha the next morning, confessing my treacherous behaviour. ‘Don’t tell anyone’, she said. ‘They will crucify you.’

She had slept with her male pursuit. She said the guy was a virgin, and that his whole family had prepared a *deflowering* ceremony for them both. As we talked, it felt like we were suddenly old friends. She confided to me that all she wanted was a simple relationship, and that she wanted to have more children – two girls. She said that this man might be the one to give that to her and confirmed that they had talked about it the night before. It felt like Natasha and I finally had something in common.

As the day progressed, Natasha began discussing and investigating the possibility of opening a resort in Samoa. She went to some real estate agents and began describing to us the opportunities that lay in Samoa for each of us. I began fantasising that I could bring my two children to this paradise and be with the strong, handsome man from the night before. That day, the young man had climbed one of the palm trees and retrieved a coconut and cut it open for us all to share!

As the days wore on, Natasha’s suitor disappeared and the fantasy she had built in her mind (and ours) was destroyed. One afternoon, we were sitting around waiting to go swimming at one of the local waterholes. I thought Natasha was making cryptic comments in front of everyone about how I was treating Michael. I believed she was giving me signals

to reveal my secret. So, in an emotional outburst, I told everyone in the group what I had done. They were all shocked and disgusted. Heather said she had come looking for me that night but couldn't find me. I could see the contempt in everyone's eyes. I kept thinking: *Natasha told me to do it! She did it as well!*

Not long after, Julian confessed to Natasha about our *spooning* and more Issues arose. When we were back in the group, Natasha told everyone what we'd been doing, and said to Julian: 'how could you do that with *Carli*, of all people?'

In other words, how could he be attracted to *me*?

The twist at the end of the holiday was that Julian admitted in front of everyone that he was actually in love with *Natasha*. Like so many men before him, he was now convinced that he had feelings for her. The group discussed Julian's relationship with Jenny and suggested that he should leave her, but stay true to Natasha, because even though she was now with Ben, *anything could happen*.

Eric was persuaded to leave his wife, Sasha, due to their marital problems. Dominic was persuaded to leave Alice, and encouraged to pursue a relationship with Tiffany, who had two young girls, and with whom Dominic had already hooked up with at my wedding. The whole holiday consisted of discussions about where everyone was at in their relationships, with Natasha constantly trying to navigate the path of who should end up where, and with whom.

For the remainder of the holiday, I still held onto fantasies of escape from my world at home, with the young man in Samoa, though I knew better than to speak to him again. He would look at me from afar and I at him. Before we

left, I saw Natasha talking to him on her own. She later told me that he wanted to be with me, but she had convinced him that I had a husband and two children, and it wouldn't work out.

Upon arriving home, it was difficult to keep my infidelity from Michael. In a group meeting, we discussed all the relationships that had been deliberated upon in Samoa. Obviously, the spooning of myself and Julian became a big Issue. The fact that Julian was now in love with Natasha did not get a mention, as Natasha wanted to keep that one under wraps from her best friend, Jenny. Behind the scenes, however, she worked on breaking them up. I was surprised when there was no mention by anyone of my liaison with the Samoan man. I couldn't shatter Michael so close to the wedding, and I dreaded what he might think of me, so I decided I would have to live with myself and keep that secret, at least for now.

As before, but worse, I tried to convince myself that everything was ok – yet I was tormented with my guilt. On the one hand, I had been told by Natasha that Michael was not good for me; on the other, she had said I was not good for him. *It had been her that had convinced us to get married, wasn't it?* I found it difficult to wade through her opposing comments and my own perceptions of reality. No matter what, in my inner core, I knew that I was only adding more darkness to my soul with each new step I took.

Separation

SINCE MY COMING back from Samoa, Michael's behaviour had rapidly deteriorated. He knew that something wasn't right. For a whole week after I'd got back, I had been physically ill. I felt like a large, thick, metaphysical black blanket was smothering my entire body. I couldn't move. Michael left me in bed, and I didn't have much to eat or drink as I tried to recover with little support. Eventually, out of excruciating guilt, during a Combined PMC meeting I blurted out what happened with the Samoan man. I pleaded with Michael, trying to convince him that the liaison was fleeting, but the little communication that existed between us now shut down completely.

Soon after, Natasha told me that she thought Michael must be sleeping while he was supposed to be working, and that he was *drinking*. I became obsessed at trying to catch him out on all his lies. No one knew exactly what he was doing, but Natasha said, 'he must be doing *something*, and that something is no good.'

By the middle of August, Natasha persuaded me to leave Michael and move in with Jenny. Jenny and Julian had indeed separated after Samoa and Jenny needed extra money to pay her mortgage. Natasha told me to go on the Government's

Single Mother's Pension and that this would help me to stay afloat without Michael. I subsequently told Michael: 'You are unreliable, a liar and you take no responsibility. I'm leaving!'

We both moved out of our favourite unit at Pottsville, and I moved into Jenny's.

Michael was in a really bad space. Natasha had taken his car keys off him so that he could not leave the property without her say-so. He was now driving a car he had borrowed from his brother, as our car had blown a gasket. His brother's car was old, decrepit, and bright green. One weekend, as we were holding the program *Universal Healing* at Omaroo, I grew concerned that the green station wagon would look terrible sitting in the driveway when students came up. I gave Michael his keys to move it. He took the keys and drove down the driveway and never came back. He wouldn't answer his phone. He had essentially disappeared.

~

In November 2005, Natasha held the *Children's Awakening* program. This one-and-a-half-day course was specifically designed for the children of Awakened adults who had completed *The Next Evolutionary Step*. Natasha's sons were on the Support Team for this program, along with the regular Support Team including Jenny and Janet, the senior Instructor. At the last minute, Natasha said that Sebastian could participate in the weekend too. I was elated. Michael was no longer around, and I thought it would give Sebastian some connection with the other Enlightened children. Sebastian was only four and normally children had to be

around six years old to participate. I took it as a sign that Sebastian was *advanced*.

I peeked through the curtains of the course room as the children were read stories, and watched from afar as the kids undertook activities such as painting and bushwalking. At the end of the program, Natasha gave each of the parents a report on where their child was at and advice on what the parents had to change, to enable their children to move through their Patterns. I was told, among other things, by Natasha: “Not enough, if any parenting at all; very whingy, demanding, controlling; he needs strong discipline; feels there is not a lot of truth around him; has got a problem with lying – needs appropriate discipline”.

~

When Natasha returned from another trip to South America, she told us that she wanted to start up a new business in travel. She came up with the company name ‘Sun Earth Tours’. She asked me to create tours in Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina and said she would give me ample information to enable me to design the tours and write content for the brochures. I was excited at the prospect of doing this, and happy that Natasha had entrusted me with such an important project. In my mind, it also gave me an opportunity to contribute to the business’ income, to help salvage some of the money I had lost for Natasha when I had screwed up in the office.

When Natasha gave me a handful of business cards and a small number of brochures, I realised I would have to plan out virtually every aspect of the tours from scratch. I

commenced researching online and within a couple of months had created two or three tours in each country. Natasha had around 20,000 brochures printed, and we promoted Sun Earth Tours to student databases and in newspapers. I was terrified when I realised I may have miscalculated the travel times between flights or buses and the distance to monuments, places of interest and accommodations. I knew I'd be in big trouble if I had wasted Natasha's time and money. Out of all the promotion we did, we got one bite from a middle-aged man who wanted to travel to Peru. Even though there was only one person, Natasha wanted the money, so she sent Sarah – who she had previously taken to South America – with him for the three-week tour. Sarah had to pay for everything herself. I wondered how she had managed to do that and cope with being a tour guide, alone with this stranger for such a long period of time in a foreign country.

With Natasha's love of South America, she began taking Salsa dancing lessons. She would have an instructor come to Omaroo and teach her in the Centre. Before long, she asked the girls working at Omaroo if we wanted to join her. Soon we bought jazz shoes and began choreographing dances. Natasha's youngest son, Timothy, was an up-and-coming dancer, so it was an area that Natasha knew and enjoyed. She bought us all matching costumes and we would present the dances at our celebration nights. It was a great time in our involvement with what we now called UK (Universal Knowledge). It felt like things were going smoothly for a change and that Natasha's promises of a bright future for all of us just might happen.

By the end of the year, the PMC '05 students were a train wreck due to the physically and emotionally demanding PMC process. One of the students, Sam, whose wife Harriette had completed the course in 2004, was targeted for his many alleged shortcomings. He had been told on a number of occasions by Natasha that he was an unfit father and husband, and that his children were “lost” under his parenting. Harriette, who had paid \$15,000 to train as an Instructor the previous year, had been working long hours in Natasha’s office promoting a new strand of the Parenting Program, which was being marketed to schools all around Australia.

Natasha convinced Harriette to separate from Sam and to move down to Burringbar from Brisbane, on the premise that it would be better for their children. Sam was a lawyer, and they were very well off financially. On Natasha’s instruction, Harriette left Sam and took their children out of their private schools in Brisbane, settling them into a small public school in Murwillumbah. Sam was beside himself. He had no intention of continuing with the courses, as his brain was completely warped by the year’s events, and to top it all off, he had been unfairly blamed for the whole group’s failure to complete their final 11:11 task successfully, just as Michael had been. He now felt powerless, as he faced the possibility that he would lose his family forever, to an organisation he now began openly calling a ‘cult’. He set about educating himself on the workings of destructive cults and sought guidance from psychologists and other professionals. He asked Harriette to read a book that he had bought on cults.

Eventually, she read what it had to say. With luck on his side, he was able to extricate his wife and children out of Natasha's clutches and move them safely back home to Brisbane.

~

At Natasha's New Year's Eve party at the end of 2005, everyone's children were left to sleep in the Centre, while their parents enjoyed a dinner and celebration in Natasha's house. Not long after the children were put to bed, Tiffany came down from the course-room saying there was urine and faeces all over the floor and that some of the children's nappies had been taken off. She told Natasha she had noticed that Sebastian had changed his pyjama pants.

Natasha flew up to the course-room in a rage, wooden spoon in hand, followed by all the mothers. She found Sebastian, who was the oldest of the kids in the room at four years old, tucked in bed, and screamed at him: *'What have you done?'*

Sebastian sat up in shock. 'Nothing,' he said.

She demanded an explanation of what had just happened. *'Stand up! Did you take off the children's nappies?'*

He shook his head and trembled. 'No.'

'Did you smear this poo all over the floor?'

He again whimpered 'no', his little body shaking.

Natasha started belting into him with the wooden spoon. When it broke, she yelled to Tiffany: 'Get another one from the Centre Kitchen!'

Tiffany raced off to the kitchen and came back with a metal spatula. Again, Natasha started smacking him. She then told Tiffany and Kate to start hitting him as well. After they'd both smacked him, Natasha turned to me and shouted: '*Carli, he's your child. You spank him!* You have to teach him these lessons, not just us. Discipline him now, otherwise he's going to be a monster when he grows up!'

With little comprehension of what was actually happening but knowing that I didn't want Sebastian to be a victim of this occurrence again in the future, I took the spatula and followed suit. I cringed as I laid each whack onto his little body.

When the beating was over, Natasha made Sebastian go around to every cot and say sorry to each child for what he had done. The ordeal seemed to go on for an eternity.

After the children were cleaned up and settled back into their respective cots, we left the room. As we walked back down to the house, Natasha commenced to tell me that Sebastian had coordinated the whole thing. 'I'm certain that Sebastian has been molested when he was little,' she said, 'whether it was by Michael or someone in your family or Michael's family.'

She went on: 'I think Michael has taken Sebastian and possibly Jacob, on one or more occasions, to a park or the beach where he has been meeting up with men for sex. I've believed for some time that Michael is gay. He has to be doing something when he doesn't come straight home from work. Sebastian has just re-enacted a scene he has witnessed.'

Natasha said she had learnt a lot about gay men when she investigated Luke, her ex-partner, who she said was by this

time, openly gay. She described how ‘before gay men have sex they defecate.’ She said this was what Sebastian was re-enacting. I was in shock as I tried to digest what Natasha was telling me.

When I went back down to the party I was overcome with emotion and mortally embarrassed in front of all the other parents; I spent the remainder of the night in a trance as thoughts ran through my head about what I was told had just happened and the consequences for my son. Natasha warned me that Sebastian may molest other children and told me to keep a close eye on him from now until he was an adult. Over the upcoming months, when some of the parents left PMC, Natasha told me it was because of Sebastian.

From that point on I was always fearful when my boys would talk about bottoms or pull down their pants and run around naked. There was an incident soon after, where Sebastian was sleeping in the same room as another child and by morning the other child’s nappy was off. Natasha said that Sebastian may have pulled it off and I felt ashamed as the parents collected their son.

One day, when Tiffany was taking care of Sebastian and Jacob while I worked in the office, she took her and my kids down to the local post office and general store. Sebastian had leaned over to the back seat of the car to help do up the seat belt of one of Tiffany’s daughters’ after she had undone it. When Tiffany came out of the post office and saw Sebastian leaning over, she flew into a rage, slapping Sebastian all over his face and body. Tiffany screeched up the Omaroo hill in her car and stormed into Natasha’s house, screaming: ‘Sebastian was touching Sally in the car, I caught him!’

I ran down from the office when I heard the commotion. Sebastian was now black and blue with bruises. ‘Ok Tiffany,’ Natasha said, ‘please calm down and leave this with me to sort out.’

After Tiffany left, Natasha said to me: ‘Look, Carli, I don’t believe Sebastian did anything. Tiffany is a fairly promiscuous woman and it’s likely that it was *her* daughter doing the molesting, not Sebastian. I wouldn’t leave your children alone with her again.’

I felt better knowing that Sebastian was innocent, but wondered why Natasha didn’t overtly express her opinion of the situation to Tiffany. I also knew that not leaving my children alone again with Tiffany would be difficult, seeing as Tiffany had taken responsibility of looking after my kids while I worked, and I was paying her.

I had still not heard from Michael. Natasha maintained that Michael was gay, and she would use these sentiments to sway my moods and sustain the distrust I had toward him.

~

Towards the end of the year, I was given the responsibility to organise a holiday for Natasha and her three boys. She wanted to go skiing as they often had done previously, and she was deciding between Yugoslavia – her family’s homeland – and France. In the end, she chose Andorra in France, and added that she also wanted to visit Spain. I researched some possibilities and presented her with all the options. I was happy that I had been given another important task but was extremely nervous that I would do something wrong. The last

time I had had anything to do with Natasha's family was when her two nieces were staying at Omaroo during school holidays, a few years before. I had been running up and down from the office to Natasha's house doing work for her. I must have been In The Shit because while her nieces watched, sitting at the bench in the kitchen, Natasha poured a jug of orange juice over my head. I felt so humiliated in front of the two young, blonde teenagers. Natasha thought it was hilarious, smirking as she always did, before sending me back to the office and turning back to her nieces to continue the conversation, as if nothing had happened.

During my organisation of the ski trip, I asked Natasha specifically what she wanted and only actioned what she told me to. I was always detailed in my communication so that there would be no misunderstandings. Natasha had invited her nephew, but she was having issues with her sister, and her sister was reluctant to send her son along. Natasha asked me to give her a quote on how much the whole trip would cost. Once the itinerary was complete, I gave her the quote and her sister agreed for him to go.

When the family arrived in Spain, a problem arose with the accommodation, as the hotel that had been booked was not close to the ski slopes, as instructed. Natasha asked me why they were staying so far from the slopes, and I explained that I had booked the correct package, but the travel agent had waited too long to chase the hotel booking, and so the accommodation I had requested nearer the slopes was all full. Natasha then started questioning me about whether I had organised for the accommodation to include breakfast and I said no, I hadn't inquired about that. She asked me if I had

organised free transfers from the airport to their hotels; I said no, I had not done that either. Once the changes in accommodation occurred in Spain, the quote I had given her changed. ‘Obviously,’ Natasha said, ‘You didn’t calculate the cost of food and transport in the quote for my sister either!’

She berated me about my organisation of the trip and said she hoped there would be no more problems along the way.

When Natasha returned, she said that because of the itinerary I had coordinated, they had had to travel by train in Paris late at night and she and her kids felt in danger of the suspicious men around them. She explained that she and her sons were carrying knives and could have handled anything that came up, but that I had still put them in that precarious situation. Because of all the alleged glitches in my organisation, and for putting them in danger, I would have to pay for their whole trip: a total of \$10,000.

The holiday had been paid by credit card, put through as a business expense under Universal Knowledge, but again, I had to deposit \$500 each week into Natasha’s personal account. I didn’t know how I was going to survive paying this and the \$200 a week rent to Jenny. I didn’t have Mick supporting me this time, and I felt sick at the thought of not having enough food to feed my children. When one day, Jenny told Natasha I didn’t have any food in the pantry, Natasha said, ‘Oh, for god’s sake, give her some pasta and sauce.’

I was so grateful when the day finally came when I made my last payment to Natasha and our abject poverty ended.

Power Play

IN FEBRUARY 2006, Kate and Tiffany were living together at 103 Hunter Street, another of Natasha's newly purchased rental properties. When physical violence erupted between Kate and Tiffany, Kate moved out. Julian had recently returned to live with Jenny and because Natasha now needed her rent topped up following Kate's departure, she told me to move in with Tiffany. After what had happened with her bashing up Sebastian, I was terrified that a similar situation would arise between Tiffany and me. I told Natasha, 'I don't want to move in with her.'

'You're being stupid, Carli,' she said. 'Just move in. Everything will be fine.'

I contemplated leaving Natasha and Omaroo at this point. I couldn't shake the feeling that something explosive would happen in the house in the near future, and that my children would be in danger. As I had done in the past when I reached this point of questioning, I mulled the thoughts and doubts over and over in my head. I knew that I had been through too much to throw it all away now. I had attempted to Integrate myself as much as I could over the last ten years. I didn't want to have to come back in another lifetime to

Cleanse myself all over again. I needed to keep myself and my children on this path and make it through Survival, for their sake and the sake of the planet.

I transported myself and my kids down to 103 and did my best to keep the tensions between Tiffany and I to a minimum.

~

One day, about five months after disappearing, Michael called me out of the blue. He said that he wanted to come and see us. He came into a Combined PMC meeting in the Centre, and he looked awful. He had dark circles under his eyes, and his skin appeared to have taken on a dark hue. It looked like he hadn't slept for weeks. Natasha explained Michael's appearance and past actions as a story: 'Like Luke, Mick's wings have been cut off, so he can't travel through to the next dimension like the rest of us. He is now a black angel.'

Although Natasha had previously said Michael was in another of the Support Team's Shaft or Lineage, she now told us Michael was in Luke's. I was horrified. *How are we going to survive with Michael if he is incapable of travelling to the next dimension with us?*

I was grateful that he had returned, but I now had to contend with the knowledge of his clipped angel wings.

~

I was still in the mindset that Michael was a *bad* person, and I was determined not to get back together with him. As he

became more involved with the children again, Natasha asked him to work on the property. He inevitably got back into her good books by creating an organic vegetable garden at the bottom of Omaroo, near the shed. The produce was sold to a couple of restaurants at Byron Bay, with proceeds going to Natasha. Michael confided to Natasha that he wanted to win me back and Natasha gave him advice on how to do so.

He sat down with Tiffany and said that he needed her help to make me jealous, so that I would fall back into his arms. With her agreement, Michael commenced the process of spending time alone with Tiffany, massaging her fully naked body in the living room at the time when I arrived home. The ploy worked, as I started getting very angry, realising what was happening. It culminated one evening when I was told that Michael was taking Tiffany to a hotel for the night. I ran home in a rage, ready to rip into her and stop them from going. I reached Michael before Tiffany and began hitting him with my bare hands and then with a belt, screaming *'What are you doing? How dare you do this!'*

I laid into him with all my might, until he punched me so hard that I stopped dead in my tracks as I winced with pain. It was the first time I realised that I wasn't as strong as I believed, and that I could be overpowered physically by a male. I flew up the hill in a rage to get Natasha to help sort out this *situation*. We discussed it all as rationally as usual, in her kitchen. Michael professed his undying love for me, even though I had just whacked the shit out of him. I stood confused at the whole scenario, emotions boiling.

Michael and I got back together. Meanwhile, Tiffany had fallen for Michael with all his nurturing attention. Tensions

heightened in the household as she grew angry at him for choosing *me* over *her*. It escalated to the stage where we were all arguing, and Tiffany finally moved out. Natasha then blamed Michael and I for sending her away. Although Tiffany initially moved elsewhere in Burringbar, she eventually moved up to the Gold Coast and no longer came to meetings or to the property, except occasionally at Christmas. Natasha said it was our fault that Tiffany's children, also Natasha's Godchildren, were now '*lost* like the rest of them.'

Once Tiffany moved out, we were faced with the prospect of full rent again. Around this time, the girlfriend of Natasha's second son, Henry, was experiencing issues at home. Natasha told us that Elizabeth had confessed that her mother was abusing her, and she no longer could bear living with her. Natasha began the process of dobbing Elizabeth's mother into the Department of Child Safety (DOCS) and instigated the removal of Elizabeth from her mother. Natasha told us that Elizabeth was going to move in with Michael and myself. Although we were enjoying living on our own, we knew that she was the answer to our financial woes.

Elizabeth moved in but was very reclusive. I found it very difficult to communicate with her – she would rarely come out of her bedroom. Natasha asked me to look after her and make sure we cooked dinner for her every night. I agreed, but we barely had enough food for ourselves, let alone enough to ensure Elizabeth was being fed as well.

The time came when Natasha accused me of not looking after Elizabeth. Even Natasha's son commented that he didn't understand why I didn't help Elizabeth or do enough for her. *How can I look after this teenager*, I thought, *when I can barely look after myself or my own children?*

It was clear to me that this was a completely unrealistic expectation. But I took it on board and felt guilty for failing to meet Natasha's expectations. After this, Natasha said she had no choice but to invite Elizabeth up the hill to eat dinner with them every night. Tensions soon grew again between Elizabeth and her mother, and Natasha was instrumental in getting Elizabeth's grandmother to move back from England to Australia, and having Elizabeth move in with her.

Upon Elizabeth moving out, Alice moved in with us. Alice had been living in Brisbane as a single parent with her two children, after Dominic had convinced her to have another child, even though they were separated. Due to Kate leaving, Natasha now needed a replacement to work in her house. Alice found it exceedingly difficult to juggle her two children with cooking and cleaning for Natasha, looking after Natasha's three kids, and doing office work during the night with Margaret, Jenny and I. Natasha began telling all of us that Alice was useless, and that Dominic should come and collect their children and look after them full-time in Brisbane, which he did.

Natasha said to Alice and me, 'The two of you, including Kate, are such bad mothers. The three of you need to get sterilised. You shouldn't be having any more children.'

Around this time, however, Natasha recommended that Margaret and I should drink a particular herbal tea that Isabelle, a naturopath, had prescribed for Natasha. She said Margaret's and my hormones were all over the place and it might help. When Isabelle gave us the tea, she warned 'be careful, it could make you very fertile'.

It was not long before both Margaret and I became pregnant. Despite Natasha's comments about my unsuitability as a mother, Michael and I had previously discussed the possibility of having a third child and were both extremely happy.

Business Expansion

IN THE HOPE of making extra money while still pushing the Universal Knowledge courses, Natasha decided to open a beauty salon. The salon she regularly attended in Byron Bay had three employees whom Natasha said were very unhappy with their current work conditions. The women agreed that if Natasha invested in a salon herself, they would come and work for her. Natasha told us that she had studied to become a beautician after she had left school, so she already had the skills to be highly successful in the industry.

Natasha called on the support of her PMC students to help her in this project. One of her ex-Support Team members from the early days, Graham, was recruited back as Project Manager. He was living in Melbourne at the time. Julian and Michael, as well as some PMC '05 students and those of us in the office, were all on board. Natasha bought premises on the corner of Bay Street, opposite Byron Bay Surf Club. It had a view of the beach, and she projected that the salon, situated on prime real estate, would be highly lucrative. She called it Earthly Beauty, and we had a December deadline, so that she could turn over a large amount of money during the peak Christmas season. She rushed to get all of us girls trained up,

with the help of one of the beauticians from the other salon. We all thought it was a great new adventure and we looked forward to the new business. It would be something different to cleaning and working in the office, and it would help to prop up Universal Knowledge's income, as course numbers were now almost non-existent.

Everyone put a lot of their own money into the beauty shop, especially Graham, who had been away from the group for a couple of years. Although everyone else knew they would not be reimbursed for any expenses, Graham put in a petty cash sum in the order of thousands of dollars, which he expected Natasha to pay back. Natasha had no intention of reimbursing him, so he left before the job was completed, never to return. This meant the remaining PMC guys had to work through the night until it was completed. Michael had to pay for further wood for the benches, because when Natasha inspected them, she told him they were the wrong lengths.

Earthly Beauty began with the plan that those three girls from the competing salon in town would leave their current workplace and come work for Natasha. This occurred at first, but the business did not succeed immediately as projected, and those employees were soon phased out, because Natasha could not afford to pay them. We had hoped that we would finally be renumerated for our efforts once one of Natasha's businesses made the fortune that she had predicted, but Natasha told us that we would have to work in the shop, unpaid, until the business became profitable. Margaret managed the salon and the office, as well as Natasha's personal affairs, and Isabelle left her stable job to work in the salon full time. Sarah and Alice would rush down from

Burringbar when there were extra bookings, and from time to time in the holidays Jenny and I would be called down to perform simple treatments like a massage or pedicure – things that we couldn't *stuff up*.

~

When the beauty shop wasn't the bonanza she expected, Natasha thought that buying a Bed and Breakfast would certainly be a success. She bought the newly renovated Arcadia Guesthouse, a few blocks away from the salon, still in the centre of town. Natasha sent her eldest son, Justin, in his first year out of school, to manage Arcadia. He had his own office/bedroom that his girlfriend at the time shared with him. After around nine months, Justin left to attend university and Isabelle was asked to manage Arcadia by herself, juggling her responsibilities there and at Earthly Beauty. She moved out of her rental home in a neighbouring town and moved into the room/office where Justin had been living.

Natasha soon realised she could make more money by converting the room in which Isabelle lived into another guestroom. Before long, she converted the living room, where guests had previously relaxed, into another guestroom as well. Isabelle now slept in one of the guestroom's beds if a room was not booked. When the rooms were fully booked, she slept on the floor of the walk-in pantry. This cupboard, which was less than 1.5 metres square, was now used as the office as well. When Sarah or Alice had to stay in Byron Bay during the busy school holidays, two people slept in the cupboard.

After a couple of years, Isabelle began going out with a builder who offered to build her an *actual* room off to the side of the guesthouse. He completed the renovations at his own expense, and once the room was completed, Natasha began deriding him and convinced Isabelle to break up with him.

~

Growing more and more ambitious, Natasha proposed another new business: “Omaroo Weddings”. There had already been a wedding held at Omaroo, years before, and with the hindsight of that event, her wedding with Jeremy, and Michael and mine, she told us that we were perfectly set up to make a fortune. We commenced preparations for an Omaroo Weddings Open Day. We worked long and hard to prepare the property to look its best, and called the newspapers and radio stations, as well as wedding suppliers from the local area, to come and inspect the property as our potential future partners. A couple of us were going to dress up in our wedding dresses and to enact mock wedding ceremonies for our guests in various sections of the property.

As the day approached, I thought, *this would be a great opportunity for Michael and me to renew our vows, even if we’re just roleplaying.*

Just before Michael had run away the first time after we were married, someone had broken into our Pottsville unit and stolen my wedding ring. At the time, I had taken it as a *sign*, symbolic of our deteriorating relationship. Now came my chance to create a new beginning, with our pregnancy and our renewed marriage commitment. I was able to buy another ring

and I had it inscribed with something meaningful to both of us.

The day was a small success as we had several local suppliers come to check out our perfect wedding venue. In the ensuing weeks, however, Isabelle received a call at Arcadia Guesthouse from a woman who wanted to inform her that the wedding venue she may have recently attended was in fact a cult, and that she shouldn't have any dealings with the organisation. The woman said she had evidence in the way of a CD with an *A Current Affair* segment on the cult, and some further information she could send in the mail. It became apparent that ex-students had called all the suppliers and media who had attended the property and didn't realise that Arcadia Guesthouse was owned by Natasha. Natasha guessed that Harriette and Rebecca were involved. Isabelle agreed that it had sounded like Harriette on the phone. Natasha became *incensed*.

Tighter Controls

BY THE END of 2006, Natasha had managed to persuade another small group of seven to commence *Personal Mastery*. This group was a mixed bunch. Two of the students were friends of Natasha's from university, who had only completed *The Next Evolutionary Step* that year. A few were students who had also only completed the first program, and another couple of students had undertaken some of the more advanced programs earlier on in LIP's history. They had been vigorously encouraged by the Combined PMCs to take their next step. Natasha broke her own rules of never allowing students to do PMC unless they had completed *Universal Healing* and *The Final Step*. Hence, except for two students, the rest had only gone through the relatively tame five-night and two-day introductory course. They were not prepared for the highly demanding, virtually impossible, *Personal Mastery* process.

While PMC '07 was progressing, both Michael and I were not in Natasha's good books. Michael's consistency of performance the year before was diminishing – and I couldn't put my finger on it, but he *was* hiding something.

I was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain my regular commitment of long hours in the office while I was pregnant. I made concerted efforts to stay up to all hours typing Natasha's university lectures and tutorials, her assignments, and the sections in her textbooks she had highlighted to prepare notes for her upcoming exams. As the CDs rolled in, I would be typing five or six lectures per week, which took about ten hours per disc, as well as her tutorials, which were of similar length. It was a demanding schedule. I was also on edge most of the time, as I was afraid Natasha would get angry at me for being too slow. When I was typing her assignments, if I couldn't read certain words, she would yell down the telephone: 'You're *wasting* my time!'

TNES

From: "Ebooks" <ebooks@lytemail.com.au>
To: <l.natasha@student.qut.edu.au>
Sent: Sunday, 20 August 2006 3:46 PM
Subject: Re: Assignment

thankyou....

i love you too I appreciate everything you do for me (although it doesn't seem like it some of the time)... thank you for your honesty - i apologise for being so gross when i have to face up to it.
I will (try) my damndest to be a better person - because i know i have some horrible aspects to myself....and i know that for god knows why you have faith in me.
Thank you for this email.....

----- Original Message -----

From: <l.natasha@student.qut.edu.au>
To: "e-books" <ebooks@lytemail.com.au>
Sent: Sunday, August 20, 2006 1:45 PM
Subject: Re: Assignment

>
> Just wanted to say thankyou for allowing me to have a breakdown this
> morning...thanks for babysitting me through this assignment....always will
> love you and your boys....all will be well....Natasha
> ----- Original message -----
>>Date: Fri, 18 Aug 2006 23:18:23 +1000
>>From: "e-books" <ebooks@lytemail.com.au>
>>Subject: Phillip's Tutorial
>>To: <l.natasha@student.qut.edu.au>
>>
>> Hi Natasha,
>>
>> Hope you had a good day.
>>
>> Here is your tutorial with Phillip in case you need
>> it urgently.
>>
>> See you tomorrow.
>> Carli
>>
>>PYB350 TUTORING Lab Report.doc (122k bytes)

Email Correspondence Between Natasha and I
regarding her "Breakdown" over a University
Assignment

On 7th March 2007, a blog post appeared online written by someone calling Universal Knowledge a cult. Natasha saw it around the 20th of March and immediately began a campaign to blog in retaliation. She came downstairs from her bedroom one day and told us she'd had a dream where her Guides had told her, "a-blogging we will go".

Michael had a friend from school who was an expert in IT, and we paid him to come and teach everyone how to blog. Natasha asked Alice to type a blog under the name of Rachel Smith, which started a succession of further blogs from anonymous people outside Universal Knowledge writing scathing comments about Natasha. Natasha asked everyone to write positive blogs about her. I was not asked to write any blogs and wondered why. I figured I didn't have the time to do so anyway.

Within days of the commencement of the blogs, PMC '07 students began dropping off. Natasha's university friends dropped out after one of their husbands prevented his wife from continuing. The rest of the group, except two, followed suit. One of the two students who remained was a family friend of Natasha: Peter, who had been involved in the organisation on and off in the early years. He and Natasha still often mixed in the same circles at family functions in Sydney.

Natasha approached me one day and said she had decided that Michael and I must join the PMC '07 group as they needed support to finish the year. I couldn't believe my ears. I was due to have our third child in early July and I was inundated with work that Natasha was constantly giving me. Natasha said there was no way that these two students would be able to do it on their own. She added that this was a deal

breaker. 'If you and Michael don't Shift after this process,' she said, 'then I can do nothing more for you.'

My whole stomach turned inside out as I began to comprehend what was about to happen. I hesitantly picked up the phone and called Michael at work:

'Natasha said we have to do PMC again.'

'There's no way,' he yelled. 'I'm *not* going to do it!'

This would be the second time for me and the third time for Michael.

'We have to do it or else we'll be destined to be failures *forever*,' I implored him. 'Natasha won't help us anymore if we don't.'

It is obvious to me now that Natasha pushed us onto the program to save face in front of her family and the student, Peter's. It wouldn't have looked good for her to face the ridicule, especially from her sister, who by now had become estranged from Natasha.

We began the course assignments hoping we wouldn't have to catch up on any of the ones we had already missed. Natasha, however, ordered us to do the assignments from the beginning. We were drowning.

For my brother's thirtieth birthday in mid-April, I was allowed to fly down by myself to attend. It was a short trip, only one night. The party was lovely, and everyone was impressed with my healthy, glowing appearance. I said I was sorry that I would be missing my dad's seventieth birthday celebrations the following week, but I promised I would call on the day. On the way to the airport, my mother let slip that she knew about the blogs. I questioned how she knew about them, and she mumbled that she was involved with 'the

Sydney Group' and that she received 'newsletters about cults because it is interesting.'

I couldn't believe what she was saying!

Upon arriving back at Omaroo, I repeated to Natasha what my mother had told me.

'I think it's best if you don't communicate with your parents anymore,' she said. 'They're obviously involved with the ex-students and the blogging, and for the sake of yourself and your children, it would be better to distance yourself.'

I didn't want to do that. 'It's my father's birthday soon,' I said. 'I told him I would call him to wish him a happy birthday.'

'With all the stuff going on over the internet, Carli, I don't think you should.' Then she added: 'You should also change your home number, so they stop harassing you.'

Prior to my trip to Sydney, Issues had been raised about my mum calling Heather's house while Heather was looking after all the children while we worked. (Heather, by now, had had two children with Roger; they were living at 106). My mum had allegedly been speaking to Sebastian, trying to pry information out of him. Heather said she believed my mum was using Sebastian as a spy, as she was asking questions about what he was doing and what was going on at Omaroo.

One day I received an anonymous A4 envelope in the mail that contained information on the Cult Information and Family Support (CIFS) organisation my mother had mentioned on the way to the airport. I had been told by Natasha a few times not to read any of the blogs about her. 'They're nasty and not true, Carli, you don't need to fill your head with that rubbish.'

I knew there was no point in reading the information I'd received in the mail either, so I handed it straight over to Natasha. I thought the handwriting on the front looked like my mum's, so I divulged this information to Natasha.

When the blogging continued, Natasha said that she could *smell* my parents throughout the posts, along with Rebecca and Harriette and Sam. She said repeatedly: 'Your mother is a bitch, Carli. She has spent all your father's money. Your mother is jealous of you. She competes with you for your father's attention.'

She would often say that I was screwed up and couldn't function properly because of the parenting I had received. 'If you don't want your children to turn out the same as you,' she said, 'you need to cut off from your parents completely.'

Natasha insisted that now was the time to do it.

~

Soon after this, Heather and Roger said they were going to leave Omaroo and the area. I was surprised at their bravery. They were the first to openly express, to Natasha's face, their desire to move away. Natasha tried her hardest to convince Roger to stay. She told Roger over and over that Heather was manipulating him – that if he left, he would wake up one day and regret it as soon as he realised that Heather was the liar Natasha had professed all along. Despite Natasha's consistent efforts, they left. The group was getting smaller, and the impact of them leaving had a measurable effect.

~

By the middle of the year, Michael and I were immersed in our PMC '07 Redo assignments. It felt like they were never going to end. Unlike what I remembered of my previous PMC course, this time, if one person had not handed the Redo in on time, then we *all* had to complete it again. It was thought that the person at fault would feel guilty and do a better job next time. But the other female in the group was not Shifting and it became impossible to push her to change. With no end in sight, she also dropped out of the course. As opposed to previous PMC years where we had chased people who left, and harassed them until they came back, Natasha told us specifically not to chase her:

‘I don’t want us to look like a cult.’

While I was heavily pregnant, I was made to participate in one of the usual PMC processes. The group would get several black mats, the gymnastics-style ones we Accessed on, and one person had to lie down while the rest of the group stacked the mats on top of them. The person then had to fight and claw their way out. In my first PMC year in 1998, I had been extremely proud of myself for using as much of my aggression and power as possible to fight my way out, which I did, relatively quickly. This time, however, I was seven months pregnant when Michael and Peter placed the black mats on top of my body. I could hardly breathe. I tried to move, and I just couldn’t. I yelled out from underneath – ‘Guys, please, I can’t breathe’ – but they just pushed harder. I was paralysed with terror.

‘Please guys – I mean it – I can’t breathe –’

They didn't let up. They moved the mats around and left a few open holes in places which I tried to reach before they moved again to close the gap. My mind was racing, trying to think of how to escape this *impossible* situation. I don't know how long it was before they lifted the mats, but it is still one of the most frightening memories that I have to this day.

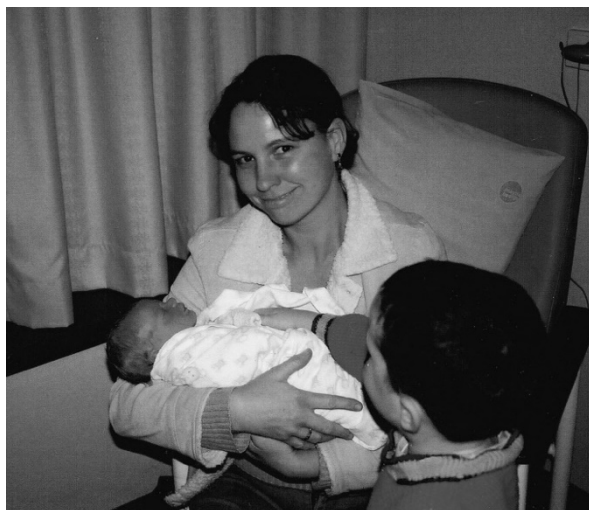
Hamish

BECAUSE I DID not call my parents on my dad's seventieth birthday in April, they began to get really worried. After my baby, Hamish, was born in July, they turned up unexpectedly at the top of the Omaroo driveway. Michael saw them as he was about to take Sebastian to school. He left Sebastian with my parents on the pavement and ran up to the office to ask Margaret what to do. Margaret called Natasha, who told Margaret to make them leave the property, or else threaten to call the police for trespassing. When Michael delivered this message, all in front of Sebastian, they argued for a few minutes before getting back in their car and driving down the hill. At the time, I was breastfeeding Hamish in the office, and felt confused and helpless. I fought the desire to show them my newborn son, but I knew that I couldn't see them.

Not long after, my brother turned up at Jenny's house one evening, where I was babysitting everyone's children while their parents were in a meeting at the Centre. I was anxious and embarrassed about dealing with my brother on my own. I called Michael who came over immediately from Omaroo. While I remained relatively quiet, for almost an hour Michael argued with my brother, who was pleading with me,

saying that our parents were beautiful people and not the tyrants that everyone at Omaroo was making them out to be. Eventually he left, and I felt relieved when he was gone.

After a few months, I received a letter from my mother, and saw email correspondence containing heated words exchanged between my mother and Margaret. Natasha told Margaret to tell my parents that they were barred from contacting me at my workplace, and furthermore told her to block their email addresses. I received further letters from my father, to which I didn't respond. I felt agony at not being able to communicate with him. I knew he was devastated over losing me. He had written numerous letters to me over the years, begging me to speak to the family, and to let them see their grandchildren. Natasha had convinced me that my mother was the reason for all my inadequacies, so at the time I wasn't as concerned about her, but I knew that my father was an innocent victim in all of this.



At the Hospital About to Leave with Hamish



Hamish with Sebastian at '103'

Apprehended Violence Orders

IN OCTOBER, NATASHA announced that we all needed to put AVOs on my family, Roger, Heather, and Rebecca. She ordered Michael and me to make statements about my parents' "unannounced visit" to Omaroo and my brother's "harassment" at Jenny's home. She said that Margaret should describe the harassment she had received from my parents at the office and that Jenny should complain about the fact that it was her property my brother had trespassed upon. I nodded my head in agreement.

Natasha told us that Rebecca had contacted Bond University, where Natasha was currently studying her Postgraduate Diploma of Psychology, to put Natasha's name into disrepute; Rebecca, she claimed, was also responsible for some of the negative blogs. There was a blog on the internet that made a vague physical threat to Natasha, and she asked me to make statements in my AVO against Roger and Heather, pointing out that it was them who had written that particular blog.

As far as Harriette and Sam were concerned, we were not asked to take out AVOs on them, but Natasha vowed that she was going to sue them for defamation once she could

prove that they had also been involved in writing the blogs. 'I'm going to take their very house out from underneath them,' she said, 'and I'm going to enjoy it!'

~

As we got closer to the end of the year, I was still consumed in typing out lectures and tutorials for Natasha's psychology degree. One night at a PMC meeting, Michael didn't show up when he was supposed to. Peter and I were waiting for almost two hours in the course-room. When Michael finally stumbled in, he gave the excuse that he had been on a run in the dark around the property and had fallen over the edge of the trail. I didn't believe him and neither did anyone else. That night, the Support Team consisted of Margaret, Jenny, and Sarah. We each asked: 'have you been drinking?'

Each time, Michael said 'no.'

We continued asking questions over a number of hours as the night progressed, until eventually Michael said: '*Yes, I was drinking!*'

All of a sudden, I couldn't contain myself. I grabbed a rod from the window, similar to the one Natasha kept behind the front door in her house (which she used on males when she beat them) and I started striking him with it. I thrashed and thrashed. After a while Margaret came up to me and said 'Carli, that's enough.'

'No,' I replied. 'A voice is telling me to keep going.'

I truly did believe that a voice inside my head was telling me I had to continue until I beat every single Psychic Flea (dark energy) out of him. It was obvious to me that the Psychic Fleas Natasha had taught us about had grabbed hold of him.

The next day he had bruises all over his body. He didn't appear to hold it against me. After only a few days his bruises had completely disappeared, and I told him what an amazing self-healer he was. We all believed we were superhuman beings.

After admitting to his drinking lapses, Michael was made to stick close to Omaroo. Our PMC group of three didn't know how we were going to manage the coordination of our end-of-year function, the 11:11. The date was getting closer, and we were still at a dead-end as to what we would present. In the two weeks leading up to the event, instead of giving us time off to finalise our preparation and make the night a success, Natasha kept both Michael and I working on the property around the clock, and even got Peter to help. She said that Michael had been lazy and had not worked hard enough to complete everything on his own, and that Omaroo had to be completely brought up to scratch before he could even step off the property. One morning Peter gave Michael \$200 of his own money to go and hire two whipper-snippers after the ones on the property had broken down. After a while, Michael had not returned. Peter and I started calling and leaving messages on his phone. When he had still not shown up twenty-four hours later, I realised that he had run away, *again*.

As I sat on the grass, staring out to the valley below, my heart was heavy and my mind resigned. Once more, I didn't have support with the kids, and I had been left to cope on my own. I cried to the Universe, *why do things have to be so hard?*

I picked myself up off the ground, continued mowing, and tried to convince myself I could do without him.

Peter and I set about finalising our event without the help of Michael. Natasha said that, due to the circumstances, we would hold the function at Omaroo, as mostly everything else had fallen through. Jenny joined us in the preceding few weeks to add another body to our performance and give us acting tips, as she had been in an amateur theatre group before her involvement with LIP. After Michael left, Julian also joined us. He had recently completed renovations to Natasha's Kangaroo Point property in Brisbane, which Natasha had had him working on throughout the year, away from Jenny and their kids, as penance for him being In The Shit.

We held the final PMC event on the 11th of December. It was a comical enactment of the TV series, Baywatch. I dressed up as Pamela Anderson and we each pranced around in red lifesaver costumes, singing, and acting out a script we had written. It turned out to be a very funny night, and all the visitors, including some of Natasha's family and friends from Sydney, had fun. When Natasha congratulated Peter and I at the end of the night in front of the guests for completing PMC, I didn't feel proud or adulated by her speech. I was thinking about what task of Natasha's I had to complete next.

~

After PMC died down, Natasha told me that I would have to start doing all the property maintenance now that Michael had left. Soon after, when Kate came back on the scene, she had Kate join me. We had a rotating weekly roster. Typical jobs consisted of sweeping the tiled areas outside of the Centre and Natasha's house, front and back; cleaning the pool and

sweeping the deck; feeding the chickens water, seed, and vegetable scraps collected in compost bins in Natasha's kitchen; cleaning the chook pen of crap (all the while fending off the frequent attacks of the aggressive rooster); watering the plants and trees all over the property; weeding the numerous gardens; cleaning the rooves and gutters of the Centre and house; cleaning the inside of the Centre and house until they were immaculate; cleaning the water tanks and checking they were full; mowing the Butterfly garden in front of Natasha's house; and whipper-snipping the rest of the sixty-acre property.

Dominic would come down once a week from Brisbane to mow the grass near the shed with a ride-on mower. At times, Kate and I had to cut down clumps of lantana with an electric saw. All of this was completed rain, hail, or shine. I hated weeding the gardens in the rain, which Natasha said was the best time to do them. Leeches would crawl inside my socks and up my legs; the sight of their thick and greedy bodies, full of my blood, repulsed me. There was never a day of rest. We were constantly on the move.

We would also travel down to Byron Bay every week to clean Arcadia Guesthouse from top to bottom and perform any treatments that were required at Earthly Beauty.

Natasha purchased another property at Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast: a penthouse, overlooking the beach, so that she could be close to Bond University, where she now studied a post-graduate diploma in Psychology. Kate would mostly clean the apartment; however, I would occasionally travel up with her during the week to help clean and save her some time. Whilst working in Natasha's office and maintaining her

properties, we had to pay for everything ourselves, as usual: tools, equipment, petrol, plants, cleaning products, office supplies, everything. She had her groceries bought most of the time, giving lists to people to buy food for her. Kate and I both bought high functioning whipper-snippers on credit, to increase our efficiency as we took on the vigorous demands of working outdoors, as well as in. I came to terms with being a single mother again and worked hard at simply getting all my jobs done.

One of the most menial tasks Natasha gave Kate and I to complete, to keep us occupied during the night, was to write a list of every single item that was on her property. This included everything in the Admin and Function Centre, including the name of each document within all the filing cabinets, a list of items that were in cupboards and on desks and on shelves in the office; every single item in Natasha's house; every single item in the shed; and every single plant and tree on the property. Kate had to draw pictures of the layout of everything. It took months and was literally the most frustrating and ridiculous waste of time I can remember – apart from colour-coding Natasha's coat hangers in her wardrobe.

~

As part of Natasha's post-graduate studies, one weekend, while there were a number of Combined PMCers at Omaroo, she asked a group of us to complete some surveys she had created, which would be added to her final thesis. She asked us to pretend we were a university student and to fill out the

questionnaire as if we were feeling stressed, with a high university workload. I completed two surveys, one as an Asian, male, international student, and the other one as a female, mature age student.

The completed paper was titled: “Validation of an Australian Academic Stress Questionnaire (2009)”, and it was published in the Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling. The aim of the study was “to establish the Lakaev Academic Stress Response Scale (LASRS, Lakaev, 2006) as a valid and reliable measure of stress responses”.

Natasha told us she had to get her children to help with the collation of the results as her two Bond University group members had been “too lazy to complete the work”.

~

For my first court appearance with my parents in February 2008, I had prepared my AVO case well. I read over and over my evidence, citing the visits to Omaroo and Jenny’s, and the handful of phone calls and texts which constituted my family’s *harassment*. I had hired a solicitor, who told me repeatedly that I did not have a case for an AVO and that it was very likely I would lose. He advised me that I would also have to pay court costs. Upon giving Natasha his advice, she said that I should go ahead with it anyway, as the action would scare them off and stop the blogging dead in its tracks.

Upon hearing what Michael, Margaret and I had to say in the witness box, the Magistrate said we had run out of time to hear from anyone else, including Jenny. He told me that as he saw it, there was no way that any further evidence was

likely to sway him in my favour. He said he recommended that I come to an Agreement with my parents rather than continue with court proceedings. Of course, when I returned to tell Natasha what the Magistrate had said, she told me to continue.

For the next court hearing, two months later, I represented myself, due to my solicitor refusing to represent me again. Michael, who had reconnected with us on a sporadic basis, was supposed to meet me at the Court House, but he had fallen asleep in his car, so I was there on my own. I didn't look at my parents at all during the court appearances. I kept all my attention focused on my notes. I lost the case, the Magistrate stating what was happening to my family was "a tragedy". The Magistrate charged me \$3000 in court costs and sent me on my way. Once the hearing was over, I simply drove back to Omaroo and cut the grass again as if nothing had ever happened.

My AVOs against Heather and Roger resulted in a similar verdict. My case was virtually thrown out of court in the first hearing, and I was asked to pay another \$3500 in costs. Initially, none of us could track down an address for Rebecca, in order for her to be served with AVO papers. But after calling every single architect in the Sydney metropolitan area, and some smart questioning on my part, I was able to track her down through a previous workplace. The police did the rest of the work for me. My court date was set for her as well. However, I got caught up with my work and forgot to attend the hearing.

Once the court cases were all over, Natasha asked me to order the recordings of the court proceedings so that I could

type them up. I had to pay over \$300 for the tapes and had to type up each hearing word for word. Once I had typed them, I handed the documents over to Natasha, so that she could use them as evidence against my parents, Heather, and Roger, in the defamation suits I now learnt she had taken out on them, as well as Sam and Harriette.

Seeds of Doubt

ONE DAY NATASHA arrived at Omaroo from Burleigh Heads to stay for two weeks. At first, I wasn't allowed to go down to the house and I wondered what was going on. When I finally caught a glimpse of her, I saw that she had bandages all around her face and head. Eventually I was told that she had had an operation to rectify her misshapen nose. A couple of years earlier, Natasha had been punched in the face by Justin, her eldest son. Natasha told us all that the punch had been directed at Henry, her second son, but she had stepped in the way. She had allegedly fallen and knocked her head on the marble hallstand near her front door. She now claimed she had minor memory loss and short-term memory issues, using this as an excuse to get extensions on her university assignments and for various other matters. While she was under the knife for the nose reconstruction, she said that the doctor had taken the liberty upon himself to do some further work on her. When I saw her swollen face, I couldn't believe what she had done. 'Why did you do this?' I asked. 'You were so beautiful.'

'I'm still beautiful, Carli,' she replied.

I was confused. Natasha had always maintained that as a consequence of Accessing and reaching higher Integration

levels, our facial features would become more youthful and better-looking. *Why did she need to do this?* I wondered. It left me with the feeling that something *wasn't quite right*.

~

Over the years, Natasha had made the Combined PMC group deliver promotional pamphlets – their contents ranging from information on programs, to advertisements for the beauty salon and guesthouse – into letterboxes from Murwillumbah to Byron Bay, and across to Lismore. We would have to walk around the streets, putting a flyer in each and every letterbox, until we were done. By 2008, we had to do the letter drop every two to three months. I dreaded those nights. It was like a recurring nightmare which literally almost sent me insane.

One night I was with Isabelle, Jenny and Kate and my body was so fatigued that I just couldn't bear it. I lay on the grass in front of different people's houses, trying to escape the job that lay ahead of me, feeling like a crazy person, before I pulled myself up off the ground to continue for a little while longer. By 2am I was delirious, and I called Isabelle and profusely apologised to her and told her I couldn't cope anymore. She let me off the hook and said I could sleep in the car; they completed the job by themselves. There were other instances when we were walking through the night delivering flyers in highly dangerous areas. I was constantly in fear that we would be sexually assaulted or physically attacked.

~

Once Michael was permanently living on his own, away from Omaroo near Tweed Heads, he saved up to take the boys and I on a ski trip to Perisher in the winter of 2008. I was astonished that he had achieved this. I was also thrilled to be going on a holiday and spending quality time with our beautiful children. Natasha tried to convince me that skiing was very expensive and really only for the wealthy and elite. I put my foot down and said I wanted to go, and that Michael had it all paid for.

We had an amazing time. It was delightful to watch Sebastian and Jacob learn to ski, and I treasured the meals we shared together. Hamish looked so cute in his little all-in-one ski outfit, so much so that we were approached by a photographer, who took a photo of Hamish and asked permission to put it on the cover of a magazine.

We were supposed to be away for a week and were due to visit Michael's brother on the outskirts of Sydney after we left the snow. However, I received a call from Kate, who ordered me back to the property. I had not wanted to answer the phone as I knew it would only be bad news.

'You don't have to go!' Michael said.

I tossed it over and over in my head. I was so angry. I was so desperate to continue the holiday, but I knew I would be in trouble if we didn't return immediately – so I said, 'I'm sorry, Mick, we have to go back.'

Michael took us straight back to Omaroo, dangerously driving twelve hours through the night. It turned out that nothing imminently awaited us when we got there.



Towards the end of the year, Natasha took her children to Chile, for their own ski holiday. Whilst over there, Natasha's eldest son, Justin, had a major accident whilst skiing on a Black run. We were told via Margaret that Justin had broken his back. We heard that Natasha would spend the next month over in a Chilean hospital trying to save her son's spine. When Natasha came home with him, she told us many harrowing stories of the events that had taken place. She said, specifically, that 'the accident happened on a day when I didn't go out with the boys.'

She gushed that the doctors had commented on how he had recovered more quickly than they had predicted – which to us, meant that she had used her special healing powers on him. Just before Natasha got home, Margaret ran away, much

to all our surprise. During Natasha's holiday, Margaret had announced that she was expecting her third child. I congratulated her with enthusiasm, as I knew that she had wanted another baby. Margaret told us that when Natasha had found out about it, she had said: 'I suppose congratulations are in order.'

Unbeknownst to the rest of us, Natasha had been screaming at her over the phone daily, blaming her for Justin's broken back. Natasha told us that Margaret was *metaphysically* responsible for her son's condition, as she had not been taking care of Natasha's affairs. Natasha also accused her of stealing \$10,000 of Justin's savings from managing Arcadia guesthouse, that had allegedly been sitting in a bank account.

Natasha relayed the whole story of the lead-up to Margaret leaving, and how Margaret had crippled Natasha financially. She said Margaret had made decisions without Natasha's permission: 'Because of Margaret, I now have debts up to my ears and I don't know how I'm going to get out of them.'

During the year, Natasha had persuaded Jenny to go in with her on a subdivision of Jenny's property which adjoined Natasha's, '106'. When it became evident that the subdivision was having problems and may not be passed through Council, Natasha sold 106 to Sarah. Sarah had borrowed around \$150,000 from her parents to pay for the deposit on the property. Natasha had sold 106 to Sarah for \$500,000 according to the bank, but under the table, Natasha had asked Sarah for \$200,000 more.

After Margaret's departure, Natasha asked both Sarah and Jenny to pay her \$150,000 each for "consultancy fees" in

relation to the subdivision of 106. Sarah was struggling to make the repayments on 106, as well as pay rent for Natasha's Kangaroo Point property, which Sarah was also renting from Natasha at the same time. Nonetheless, Sarah borrowed another \$150,000 from her parents – which they said was in lieu of her inheritance – and gave that to Natasha. Dominic escorted Jenny to the bank, to deposit her \$150,000 into Natasha's personal account, which Jenny had also borrowed from her elderly parents.

Jenny and Sarah then became responsible for cleaning up Margaret's Mess in the office. It was later discovered that Jenny had allegedly covered up another accounts Mess herself. Jenny was forbidden from going to her external job, where she made her income, until she cleaned up the Tax Invoices. Natasha said she had to sleep at Omaroo full-time until it was done, and that her partner, Julian, had to look after their kids. Just before Christmas, Jenny told Natasha she had completed the tidy-up, so that she could spend Christmas Day with her children. When Natasha found out that Jenny hadn't actually finished, she was *furious*.

She began telling everyone: 'Jenny's children are much freer and confident while Jenny has not been looking after them. They are so different without Jenny smothering them and abusing them.'

She gave us the directive that Jenny was not to see her children anymore, to give them a chance to be free of her. 'Keep Jenny away from her children,' she said. 'Even if it takes force.'

At this time, Kate and I were living together at 103. One night, when Jenny attempted to see her kids while they were

sleeping at our house, I pushed her away and said: ‘You’re not allowed to see them. Get out!’

On another occasion, Sarah told Kate to take Jenny down to 103, in order to help Kate clean her section of the house, because she had been too busy to do it herself while working at Omaroo. Kate told Jenny to wash the dishes. The kitchen was in my section of the house, which was close to where her boys were sleeping. Jenny tried to sneak in to see them and give them a cuddle. When Kate found out, she dobbed Jenny into Sarah. When they were both back up at the Centre, Sarah bashed up Jenny for trying to see her kids, and then bashed up Kate, for telling Jenny to go into the kitchen!

Natasha’s son, Justin, and his now girlfriend, Patricia, (who was a new, young friend of Natasha’s at Bond University), had been asked by Natasha to check Margaret’s account entries in MYOB. Subsequently, Patricia became riled up by Natasha about the whole situation, after discovering that many of the entries were incorrect. Realising she and Justin would have to spend hours fixing them, even Patricia, who had a postgraduate degree in Psychology, began getting stuck into Jenny, due to her frustration and resentment. Natasha immediately pulled Patricia back: ‘You can’t risk getting disbarred from the Psychology Board!’

But it didn’t stop Natasha. Natasha beat up Jenny once that I personally saw, and verbally abused her on a daily basis, particularly about her children. At one point, Natasha said to all of us: ‘Jenny is only allowed to sleep for two hours, or else she will start *planning*.’

She repeated: ‘If Jenny does something out of line, you have my permission to hit her.’

Natasha took Jenny's car keys off her to prevent her from leaving. One day, Jenny borrowed Kate's car to go down to Arcadia Guesthouse. Because Jenny did not return Kate's car to 103 as requested, but instead left it at the top of the Omaroo driveway, Kate took Jenny into the Access room in the Centre and began hitting her violently.

Once Kate had finished and left the room, she came back a short time later and told Jenny that Natasha wanted to see her in the house. Knowing what to expect when she got there, Jenny scrambled to find her car keys and fled the property, leaving her children behind with Julian.

A \$7000 lawsuit ensued, instigated by Natasha, who asked all of us, including Julian, to write Affidavits against Jenny. Natasha told us to call up the Department of Child Safety (DOCS) and dob Jenny in for abusing her children, as well as the children with disabilities who were in her care whilst working in the healthcare industry. 'If we all do this,' Natasha encouraged us, 'Julian will be able to gain full custody of the kids.'

Both Kate and I called up DOCS and outlined to them all the abusive things that Jenny had been doing. I repeated what Natasha had told us to say. In my mind, I believed I was telling the truth. The outcome of the court case was that the Magistrate ruled for 50:50 custody. After just one week, however, Julian fled Omaroo with the kids. Within a month, Jenny and Julian were back together.

Australia's Got Talent

AT THE BEGINNING of 2009, Natasha's youngest son, Timothy, was accepted onto the TV program, *Australia's Got Talent*. He and Natasha were interviewed, and footage was taken of Timothy at Omaroo. Timothy gave a heart-warming speech about his mother, who he said had 'suffered many hardships in her life, including suffering from a terminal illness.' He dedicated his dancing in the competition to her. Propelled by both the story about Natasha and his dancing skills, Timothy was voted by the TV show's audience into the Grand Final.

Natasha subsequently commanded us to throw our kids in the backs of our cars and travel up and down the East Coast, pinning up 'Vote for Timothy' posters everywhere, including in shopping centres, hotels and wherever we could on the street. Kate and I were told to drive as far north as Noosa in Queensland. I had absolutely no money and had to rely on Kate to pay for the whole trip, mostly food and petrol. At night, we slept in the car sitting up, my three kids in the back seat.

Once Kate and I got back, Julian and Kate were told to head off west together. When they returned, entirely spent, Natasha was suspicious of their speedy timeframe: 'Did you pin up posters in *every* single town along the way?'

The pair admitted that they had missed one town, which was approximately four hours' drive away. Natasha demanded that they turn around and immediately drive back there: *'Get the job done properly!'*

Meanwhile, Ben and I were told to coordinate the sending of promotional emails to everyone on Natasha's business databases, including Earthly Beauty and Arcadia Guesthouse, as well as any other database I had typed up over the last ten years. She specifically told me not to send any emails to her ex-husband Phillip, or Phillip's mother, as she didn't want them knowing that Timothy had entered a competition which promised \$250,000 in prize money. I was careful to omit their email addresses when I sent out the first few mailouts.

~

The build-up to the Grand Final was exhausting and unrelenting. At one point, as we congregated in Natasha's living room, Timothy told us he didn't want anything to ruin his chances at succeeding. 'When the media come again to interview me,' he said, 'don't come up to the property or I will *kill* you.'

I was shocked at the last words that came out of his mouth. He was looking directly at me when he said this. I thought, *doesn't this boy realise all the hard work and effort we have put into his property and his mother's businesses all these years, let alone the work we've put into to promoting him so he can win on the show?*

I was completely taken aback. For a brief moment, I thought: *Why the hell am I working for this family?*

It was around this time I considered booking in for my sterilisation operation. Over the years, Natasha had regularly told me to get sterilised, along with Alice and Kate. She had brought it up at times when I had been In The Shit and constantly reminded me that I was an unfit mother.

Before Margaret left, Natasha sat a group of us down in her fireplace room and said: ‘We can’t afford for anyone to have any more children. That includes you two, Sarah and Isabelle. We just don’t have the manpower anymore.’

Both Sarah and Isabelle did not yet have any children, and no longer had long term partners on the scene.

The time had come where I decided to have my operation. I thought it would make me look good in Natasha’s eyes, and I was increasingly realising that I wouldn’t be able to cope with another child in this constantly stressful environment. When I visited the GP to book in for the Tubal Ligation, he asked me: ‘Are you sure you want to do this? You still have a number of fertile years left.’

I said, ‘Yes, it’s fine.’

I was booked in for March.

Mortgage

EARLY IN 2009, Natasha suggested that Dominic, Isabelle, Kate, and I buy 103. She said it would be the best thing for each of us, to provide solid foundations for our children. A few years previously, Natasha had tried to persuade Dominic to buy the property on his own. She had managed to extract a \$40,000 cash deposit out of him, but the rest of the money never eventuated due to Dominic's finances at the time. Now she suggested that the four of us apply to some banks for a home loan with which to purchase the property. I was excited at the prospect of finally owning my own home, even if it was with three other members of our Group.

Isabelle, Kate, and I tried our hardest to come up with our share of the deposit – \$50,000 each – contacting numerous banks and credit lenders. Kate managed to convince her father to give her \$50,000 and Isabelle persuaded her mother to give her the deposit amount too. Having estranged myself from my family the year before, I applied with numerous banks but continued to receive rejections. Natasha said I could pay her \$500 interest a week until I could come up with my \$50,000.

Natasha told us to get evaluations on the house, but when the first valuation came in at only around \$500,000, Natasha

told Isabelle to ask other agents to value the property until it was valued at \$750,000. Kate's father withdrew his offer to lend her the deposit, so with Kate and my poor credit ratings, Dominic and Isabelle were offered a joint home loan for \$600,000 in their names only. To help make our share of the mortgage and interest payments each week, Kate and I applied for jobs working night shifts at McDonalds, Chinderah.

~

On 10 March 2009, I was lying on the hospital bed, waiting for my tubal ligation. I was afraid that I would be awake throughout the whole operation and feel the pain. But after seeing the doctor put the needle in my arm, I passed out immediately, before waking up feeling groggy and very tender.

Michael picked me up from the hospital and dropped me off at McDonalds where I was due to have my interview for the new job. Whilst I was waiting, sitting on the curb outside the restaurant, my mobile rang, and I saw Natasha's number flash up on the screen. I picked it up anxiously, as was always the case, and started hearing her screaming at me down the phone: *'You c*nt, you bitch, you fucking fat, ugly dog! You sent Timothy's father and grandmother the promo emails when I told you not to!'*

I couldn't believe my ears. I was in shock. My body ached as I tried to gather my thoughts and digest what was happening. 'I'm sorry, Natasha,' I said. 'I must have forgotten to take them out again. I'm sorry... I'm sorry.'

But she just kept screaming: ‘You fucking never do anything I ask you to! You purposely try to sabotage everything in my life! You’re a fat, useless piece of shit!’

When she finally hung up on me, I sat paralysed on the curb. *Why is she doing this to me?* I cried to myself. *I’ve just had the operation that she wanted me to have. I did this for her!*

I sat grieving, trying to bury the pain of the words that had just been spoken by the person I looked up to, the person from whom I was constantly seeking approval. Again, confusing contradictions raced through my head. *Why am I here? What am I doing all of this for? Does she really love me? Is she really going to protect me and my children during Survival?*

When it came time for my interview, I took a deep breath, desperately buried the feelings of the past half an hour deep into my soul, mustered together my happy face, and successfully secured a part-time job to help me pay for my new mortgage.

~

I was surprised when Natasha invited me to take Sebastian down to Melbourne with them to sit in the audience for the *Australia’s Got Talent* Grand Final. I was very nervous travelling with Natasha and her boys. While Natasha was off at the hairdressers, the boys said they were going to McDonalds for lunch. I knew, firstly, that McDonalds food contained meat, which we weren’t supposed to eat, and secondly, that it was bad, take away food, and I couldn’t

understand why they were going there. Nonetheless, I bought a burger and chips for Sebastian and felt very guilty about it.

I was especially anxious about meeting Natasha's parents, who were also going to be at the show. When we got to Natasha's hotel room, she invited me in like I was one of her friends and introduced me to her parents. They offered me some of the snacks on the table. I politely declined, knowing that I shouldn't be eating Natasha's food. Her mother gave me a strange look.

Natasha had mentioned on occasion that she had worked in her father's restaurant as a child and teenager, and that he had promised that he was going to give her and each of her siblings \$100,000 – which he never did, according to her. Little did he know that his daughter was now repeating the *Pattern* and not paying those who worked tirelessly for her.

As we watched the show live, the host introduced Timothy to the stage. The cameras turned to Timothy's supporters in the audience. Sebastian and I clapped and screamed as hard and as loud as we could.

Back home, when it came time to vote for Timothy as the winner by calling the 1300 number allocated to him, Natasha told us to call it like crazy. I spent hours pressing redial, calling Timothy's number again and again. When eventually it was announced that Timothy had lost the Grand Final, Natasha told us that the program was rigged. She knew that, in reality, Timothy was the clear winner, and it was him who should have taken home the prize.

10/05/09

CARLI,

WE ARE A LITTLE LATE BUT HOPE SEBASTIAN ENJOYS OUR BIRTHDAY GIFT.

WE ASSUME YOU WON'T TELL HIM IT IS FROM US BUT IT WOULD BE NICE IF YOU DID.

I HAVE JUST TAKEN YOUR MOTHER TO THE AIRPORT ---SHE IS OFF TO TUSCANY FOR A MONTH WITH THREE OTHER GIRLS FROM OUR LAUGHING CLUB.

I WILL PROBABLY DRIVE TO THE SUNSHINE COAST TO SEE MY BROTHER WHO OPTED OUT MANY YEARS AGO AND HAVEN'T SEEN OR HEARD FROM HIM SINCE BEV'S FUNERAL. (the story of my life?)

I WILL ALSO SPEND A COUPLE OF DAYS WITH METTE ON THE GOLD COAST.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MEET ME FOR A CHAT WHILST I AM ON THE GOLD COAST PLEASE EMAIL ME IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS BEFORE I LEAVE.

SOMEONE SENT US TWO PHOTOS OF SEBASTIAN, JACOB AND HAMISH FROM NOBLE'S WEBSITE ---THEY ALL LOOK GOOD AND ARE GROWING UP NICELY.

DAD.

A Letter I Received from my Father, 10 May 2009

Achieving the Impossible

EACH DAY WORKING on the property I tested myself physically and was surprised at my agility and ability to keep going. I believed I could do anything. Throughout the years, I had continued to make Intentions (wishes) and they would consistently come true. When another of my cars stopped working, I was offered Dominic's car, which Dominic had bought for Justin. A couple of months prior Ben had seized the engine and the car had been left abandoned at Murwillumbah for weeks. Ben informed me that Natasha had said if I could manifest a new engine, I could have the car. Natasha had on occasion promised to give me a car one day (as reimbursement for my work) so I was thrilled when she made this gesture. The previous year, she had tried to sell me Ben's six-year-old, Toyota Hilux ute for \$48,000 but I couldn't obtain finance from the banks. (The ute ended up in the property's dam a short time later and Ben claimed insurance for the accident).

This time I was able to borrow money for an engine from Sarah, and asked a friend who worked with me at McDonalds if she knew a mechanic. She said her husband was one and we agreed that he would fit the engine for free in exchange for me

becoming a member in their Amway pyramid selling scheme. They were coming to pick up the car key from me one morning around 10am. I had been whipper-snipping that morning for two hours on a hillside in long grass up to my waist. When they came to collect the car key down at my house, the key was not in my pocket. I panicked. If I didn't give them the key *now*, it would ruin all plans I had for the husband to fix the car on his day off! I raced up the hill to the area where I had been working. I *begged* the Universe to let me find it. I searched and searched with absolute determination. Eventually I struck gold. I found that blasted key. It was truly a miracle.

Ben hadn't told Dominic about the "gift" so when Dominic next came to the property to do the mowing, I had to tell him myself that I had been given the car. Within two months the engine had seized again due to a damaged water pump (probably the reason why Ben had seized the engine in the first place) so I had to spend another \$2000 fitting a new engine.

Once Jenny had left Omaroo, it became Sarah's responsibility to clean up the Mess not only that Margaret had made, but the Mess Jenny had made. Sarah was very resentful, as she had been made to move down from Brisbane and sleep at Omaroo most of the time like the rest of us. Before Jenny's departure, Sarah had been commuting from Brisbane every day. She had to give up her two stable, long-term nursing jobs in Brisbane and find other ones near Omaroo. For years, she had said that she was planning to move down but had never done so. It was now no longer her choice.

Kate and I thought she was very rude to us, and asked her openly: why was she so *angry*? Her life had become an absolute hell as she tried to muddle her way through the accounts. She was dyslexic and the job she had been asked to do was impossible for her. She began to spiral downward and although she had been able to work some shifts at local hospitals, Natasha put her foot down, saying she couldn't work externally anymore until the accounts were fully tidied up. Eventually Sarah's mortgage and other financial commitments got too much, so she lied to Natasha and said she was finished. Natasha found out, of course; Sarah became more and more deeply In The Shit. It was now *my* turn to sort out the accounts, with Kate and Isabelle by my side. I was told I had to give up my job at McDonalds and to be up at the office by 6pm every night, after working on the property all day.

One day Ben informed us that Natasha wanted Kate and I to poison all the "yellow weeds", which grew like wildfire down three gullies, from near her house, right down to the bottom of the property near the shed. This same task had been undertaken years ago by a group of PMCs, but the persistent pest had grown back. We were also asked to poison all the lantana, of which there were copious amounts. We had to cut the branches with a machete and spray poison on each root. It was a mammoth job, and we had no idea how long it would take to complete. Every day we would trek up the hill in the burning heat and spend the whole day cutting, spraying, and pulling out the yellow weed roots. I wasn't prepared to go through this process again in another three years' time, so I was doing it *thoroughly*, one flower and root at a time – such was my level of OCD.

The task became so momentous that Michael was called in a few times to help out – but, when we had to bring the kids up with us because there was no one else to look after them, I chose to do it without Michael's help, so that he could keep the kids safe. On numerous occasions, I had come across snakes in the grass, which could have bitten and potentially killed me – I didn't want the risk of my kids getting hurt. Already, Kate had told me of an instance where Natasha's dog had saved my children's lives, down by the shed. A deadly, red-bellied black snake had been in close vicinity, and the dog had attacked and killed it. Another time, while my kids were sleeping in the Centre, I'd seen a small black snake slithering past the door. I called the local snake expert to see if he could come out to catch it, but he merely said, 'snakes are more scared of you luv, there's nothing to worry about.'

Although I didn't want my kids to sleep in the Centre after that, the man's comments didn't help my case. I had no choice but to leave them in there while I worked upstairs in the office.

~

One night, when I was only supposed to be sleeping in the Centre for a maximum of two hours, Sarah, strangely, didn't wake me until morning. When she shook me to rouse me awake, she said:

'Something's happened. Jenny's house has burnt down.'

I couldn't believe it. 'What?' I asked. 'How?'

'I don't know,' Sarah replied, 'but Natasha said not to go over there.'

Later that day, Kate asked Natasha directly if she could go and check it out. 'You don't want to go over there,' said Natasha dismissively. 'The place is full of Psychic Fleas.'

With a smile, she added: 'The Universe has intervened and sorted Jenny out.'

The police came in to investigate and concluded that the cause of the fire was arson. A can of petrol had been carelessly left behind, but police were unable to prove who did it. There were neighbours who potentially saw what happened, but nobody came forward as a witness.

From that day, Natasha became increasingly paranoid about people trespassing on the property. Her paranoia exacerbated after odd items were found in the grass, like a pair of sunglasses while someone was whipper-snipping. She would say: 'Some people would like to see me dead.'

At other times, she would say: 'People will do anything to steal evidence for their court case.'

She ordered that at least one person was to remain on the property at all times, and that the gate at the bottom of the driveway had to remain constantly locked. A schedule was devised, with a list of who would be guarding the Centre and house each day of the week and at what times.

~

It took three whole months, working solidly eight hours a day, seven days a week, to kill every single yellow weed and poison each log of lantana in the three gullies. Once we'd finished, Natasha ordered us to go back and pull out each and every lantana stump, as she said it would grow back again if

we didn't. It took every ounce of my willpower to head out once more to complete that process.

One day, Sarah, working beside me, confessed: 'I think I'm going to leave.'

It was courageous of her to confide in me. We all knew that statements like this would be passed on to Natasha and the dissenter would be in big trouble. 'No, you can't, Sarah,' I responded. 'You have to keep going! You can't let everything you've achieved over the last, what is it, fifteen years for you, go to waste. Think about Survival!'

She must have heeded my advice because she didn't go anywhere.

During my time in the gully, I'd seen Kate taking small naps when she was tired. I thought to myself, *I should be able take a legitimate half hour lunch break each day, like how we were allowed a dinner break at McDonalds*. I knew that no one would see me, so I began spending thirty minutes each day laying down in the grass, sleeping. Oh, how I loved those moments! I made sure I never went over the half hour.

Miraculously, we finished hacking out every lantana root. Masses of logs sat in piles sprawled across the gullies. We wanted to burn them so they wouldn't re-root; however, there was a fire ban on at the time. I mentally noted that Natasha didn't thank us for the great feat we had achieved. All she said was that she had wanted the job done to make the property more attractive to potential buyers.

~

In late September, I received a phone call from Michael to say that my mother had called and told him my grandmother had passed away. She was ninety-nine years old. He said the

funeral would be on October 4th. I loved my grandmother immensely and felt ferocious pangs of guilt for not seeing her since my wedding day, over four years before. I wondered what she had thought of me, separating from my family, and of all the things I had said and done leading up to this point. I desperately wanted to attend the funeral but knew that under the circumstances it was impossible. Just as I had missed my brother's wedding earlier that year, I would now miss the opportunity to say goodbye to my Nana and remember her with all my relatives in the proper ceremonial fashion.

I asked Isabelle if she could order some flowers on her credit card, as I didn't have one, so that they could be delivered to the church. I spent as much money as I could afford so that they would be a big bunch and spent ages working out what to say on the card so that my words would adequately express my love for her. A couple of my cousins called me on the day of the funeral and told me the flowers I sent were beautiful and that everyone loved me and wanted to see me. I tried to sound as cheerful as I could, before thanking them and hanging up. I was cleaning Arcadia Guesthouse on the day. I took a short break to sit down on a bed I was making to cry. I berated myself, pondering how I could have done things differently and given my Nana the time and attention she deserved before it was too late.

Military Precision

NATASHA NOW WANTED to sell Omaroo as quickly as possible. Kate and I had to maintain the property to its highest standard lest anyone be interested in an inspection. She also said we had to ensure that the property maintained its Organic licence no matter what. Natasha had registered the property as an Organic farm a few years before, even though we periodically used poisons to kill weeds and pests all over the place. Once, when the regulators had come in to test the soil and had subsequently found traces of toxic substances, Natasha convinced them that it was due to overspray from neighbouring properties.

My new timetable stipulated that I had to be up at the office by 6pm every night, meaning I was once again spending very little time with my children. I would spend around half an hour getting them ready in the morning, drop them to day-care by 8am, and work all day on the property. I'd then leave to pick them up just before 5 o'clock, bring them home, bathe them, cook dinner, dress them into their pyjamas, and leave their cooked meal on the table to eat after I had left. I was constantly rushing and *running*. Kate's son, Josh, was now back from overseas after being with his dad and was living

with all of us at 103. He was in charge of looking after my kids at home and I was paying him a small amount of money. After a while, Josh was no longer available, due to holidays with his dad, or spending time up with Natasha's boys. Subsequently, I began taking my three children up to Omaroo, where I fed them on the Centre deck, and they had to keep themselves occupied until it was time to sleep in the Access Room. I was also cooking dinner for Sarah and Ben as Sarah was not allowed to use the kitchen downstairs – I knew what that was like, having worked there for the last ten years without cooking facilities. As far as Ben was concerned, I had noticed that his bones were sticking out and presumed he must not be eating properly either. In time, I found out that Ben's collarbone had been broken years before, so he wasn't really starving – he had plenty to eat down in Natasha's pantry! I began to resent cooking for him and giving him food, when he rarely said, "thank you" and I barely had enough food to feed my children.

Natasha now told us that while Isabelle, Kate and I tidied the accounts, Sarah would work two jobs, day, and night, so she could supplement our income or give us Coles food vouchers. Kate and I were given the responsibility of the credit cards for the past five financial years and Isabelle had to start with the bank statements. This job was completed up until the final year when I was asked to complete the BAS statements for the past quarter.

I had not touched BAS for eight or nine years. I was nervous remembering my last horrific experience, but I got my head around it again and remembered most of what the

ATO investigator had told me. I at least knew how to do the credit cards and I was determined to make up for the Mess I had generated so many years before. I spent the next three weeks re-photocopying Tax Invoices and photocopying unfiled ones in folders, ensuring that the folders and paperwork within looked perfectly neat and tidy, which made it a breeze for Ben to account code.

~

We were advised that Natasha had organised to go on a trip to Denver in the US for something to do with her job as a psychologist. She had also arranged to go to New York for an extended holiday, and invited Ben to meet her over there for a week. Before Ben left, he had coded all the credit card transactions, but left me with most of the bank statements. I was uncertain of the bank statement procedure, as only Isabelle had collated these for past years. Ben told me I had to complete them by the time he landed in LA for a stopover. He said to send the completed MYOB file to him, and that he would check over everything while he was there.

I was completely burnt out by this point, as I had been sleeping literally only two to three hours per night. I had a couple of hours sleep and then began finishing the remainder of the bank statements, which took me longer than I'd expected. Ben sent me a text asking, "why haven't you sent the email? You had better have it finished by the time I reach Natasha in New York!"

I felt upset and angry at the rude tone of his text. However, I pressed on, entering the remainder of the data into

MYOB. This process took me until 2pm the next afternoon, after which time Ben had already touched down. Because my head was so spacey having had little sleep, I forgot how Ben had instructed me to send the email. The files were too big to send normally. I texted Ben about my problem. He sent me another rude text saying, “don’t you remember the Zip file I told you about?”

Again, I felt angry and upset. After all the work I had done, he wasn’t at all appreciative. I again wondered: *Why the hell am I doing all of this?*

The whole time I was doing the Credit Cards and the BAS I kept Isabelle in the loop regarding where I was at. She had been given the role of supervising me and I told her what was and wasn’t completed. It had got to the stage where Natasha demanded we put a piece of paper behind every single transaction on a statement, including the amount of interest. It was a ridiculous expectation. The whole thing became a tedious and burdensome task.

Natasha found out that although I had completed all the MYOB inputting for the bank statements, I had still not completed organising the paperwork to be put behind each statement. She yelled at me, calling me a liar. ‘You told everyone that the BAS was finished!’ She screamed.

With a trembling voice, I told her: ‘Isabelle knew I hadn’t completed it because I had to keep going with the other accounts.’

‘No, you told Isabelle you had *completed* the BAS Bank Statements *in total!*’

‘No, that’s not true.’

‘All you’ve been doing is sleeping while we’ve been away, haven’t you?’

‘I was tired,’ I said. ‘I needed to catch up on a *little* bit of extra sleep’.

In the past, Natasha had frequently used the quote “while the cat is away the mice will play”. She made this statement again now. ‘You have conned Sarah,’ she screamed, ‘taking all the money she has been paying you to fix her Mess, and you’ve done absolutely *nothing!*’

The money she was referring to was being deposited straight into the 103 mortgage account, to be then transferred by Isabelle directly to Natasha’s personal bank account.

Actually, I thought, the whole time I’ve been slogging my guts out. Isabelle has hardly been doing anything other than making extra money massaging her personal clients!

Kate was worse. Most nights she was useless, as she would sleep sitting up. I didn’t understand how I could be accused of conning *now*, when the other two women had been, in my mind, conning the whole time! I started to question the injustice of what was happening to me.

Once Natasha and Ben were back, Natasha told me they had really been over in the US so they could meet with a lawyer regarding having the blogs about her removed from the Rick Ross website. She assured us that ‘most of the time Ben was working.’

When Ben came back to the office after the trip, he told me the opposite: ‘The holiday was really relaxing, and Natasha and I got to spend some great quality time together.’

I was angry at this. I started to see the inconsistencies in Natasha’s statements.

~

Because of the sleepless nights and demanding accounts output, I didn't have the strength to maintain the property to the level I usually would. I admitted this to Natasha when she came down to Omaroo from Burleigh Heads. I made up for it over the next month, bringing the property back up to scratch.

Kate was helping to keep an eye on my children and was spending some time in our house cleaning. One day I came home to find that she had shifted the furniture in my living room. I snapped and slapped her on the face. Kate was shocked and couldn't believe what I had just done. Kate thought she was doing me a favour, making things nice in my section of the house, but to me, it felt like the only control I had left in my life, my home, had just been taken away from me. It put a sharp wedge between Kate and I. Things became progressively worse.

Thoughts of Escape

MICHAEL WAS LOOKING after our children once a week whilst living at Tweed Heads and working full-time as a Night Manager. I began to increasingly appreciate him taking the kids as it meant I knew they were in a safe environment at least one day of the week. My situation was becoming increasingly precarious as Kate, Isabelle and Ben were not defending me when Natasha derided me. I began seriously considering leaving Omaroo for good.

A couple of days before Christmas, Isabelle and Kate had ganged up on me for some reason. At two in the morning, while I was still working at my desk, Ben called and spoke to Isabelle who told me to drive up to Natasha's penthouse at Burleigh Heads, to take up an mp3 player for Timothy. I was exhausted, but I thought I could sneak my children out of the Access Room and somehow find the strength to run away. I quietly carried each of my kids down to the car and drove an hour up to Natasha's apartment.

I called Ben on his mobile to hand over the mp3 player, but he didn't answer, and I left a message. I assumed that, as usual, he was asleep on Natasha's living room floor. I didn't think I would be able to leave the device on their doorstep

because I could get into trouble for leaving an expensive item out for someone to steal. So, I slept in the car until around 5am when I called Ben and he barked at me angrily, ‘*where* are you?’

‘I’m downstairs in the car. I couldn’t get onto you.’

‘Why didn’t you bring the mp3 player up and just *leave it* on the step? The door was *open*, you could have brought it in!’

I hadn’t been up to the Burleigh penthouse in a while, so I had no idea of the goings-on at Natasha’s apartment anymore, or what protocol existed at that point in time. I took up the device and drove my children home. I was fatigued and bleary-eyed. My plan to escape was now a forgotten memory.

I received a phone call around 9am from Isabelle asking me what happened. After some coaxing, I reluctantly told her I was going to run away. It wasn’t long before Natasha called my mobile to drill me while I stood outside my house: ‘Why did you take the kids with you last night?’

I tried to sound casual. ‘No reason,’ I said.

She screamed at me down the phone. ‘*Why* did you take the kids, Carli? You’re an *abuser*, you know, Carli. Picking the kids up out of bed in the middle of the night and leaving them in the car for hours, that is *abuse!*’

She yelled at me: ‘That is abuse!’... ‘That is abuse!’... ‘That is abuse!’ repeating this statement to me for at least five minutes while my body and mind shut down.

Eventually, I admitted: ‘I was going to leave.’

‘I’m diarising everything you’re doing, Carli,’ she said menacingly, ‘and if you *leave*, I am going to report you to DOCS. Do you hear me?’

She added: ‘I will sign off on it as a psychologist, and they’ll be taken off you!’

These words reverberated through me. I stood, frozen. Although Natasha was sixty kilometres away, it was like she had me locked up in a cage, unable to escape.

Before hanging up on me, she said, ‘your children need to be in a stable environment at Omaroo, Carli. They don’t deserve to be screwed up by a mother like you.’

I had personally called up DOCS on Natasha’s request to dob in Jenny, so I knew she was capable of the threat.

Natasha came down to the property the next day for Christmas Eve. I drove up the Omaroo driveway faster than I should have, I was always in a rush, and Natasha met me at the top of the hill screaming at me that I could have killed one of her children. She told me I wasn’t allowed to drive up the driveway again, that I had to walk. Many of us had been told this at different times over the years, but I felt completely powerless and exhausted. *How am I going to get my kids and myself up that hill twice or more a day?* I felt overwhelmed.

We spent Christmas Eve and Christmas morning breakfast with Natasha and her family, but there were significantly less people attending this year. I had very little money, so I had to give everyone presents which I already had. I gave away some of Michael’s DVD collection, and I gave one Dominic’s daughters a Minnie Mouse charm from Disneyland I had been given as a present from my parents when I was 8 years old, something I later regretted. Michael

had bought a Wii for the boys second-hand from a friend and we were so happy to give the boys something special. Christmas was strained and I was vigilant that I didn't do anything to upset Natasha. It was one of our very few days off a year (including Easter Sunday), but it certainly wasn't relaxing.

On Christmas day I was trying to be as nice to Natasha as possible so that I could drive up the hill again. I told her that I would work on the accounts on Boxing Day instead of having the day off. She gave me permission.

On Boxing Day Michael and I played with the boys until around 2pm when I received a call from Natasha demanding why I wasn't up at the office. I immediately went into shutdown and tried to suppress all my anger and resentment. All I wanted to do was spend time with Michael and our children, but I trudged up to the office.

That night Isabelle asked with what money we had bought our sons the Wii console. I told her Michael hadn't paid for it yet, that it was second-hand and that his friend had given it to him, and we would be paying it off. I had told Sebastian numerous times throughout the year that Santa Claus would give him a Wii for Christmas, it was the only thing he wanted. Resentment was bubbling.

~

The next day, I entered Natasha's house, and she punched me in the face. I stood paralysed. She then started beating into me. 'I've found out what you're doing,' she yelled. 'You *are* a liar and a con-artist. You have conned *all* the people around you

by falling behind on your mortgage payments and not telling anyone!’

I had been balancing everything well financially, up until the end of the previous year, when I had had to pay accrued day-care fees and car repair bills, each worth around \$2000. I *had* fallen back on my payments. I admitted that now and said, ‘I had to pay those bills to keep working.’

What made it worse was that she did it in front of her son’s girlfriend who was the practising psychologist who Natasha had met at university. I was ashamed and humiliated and felt *weak*.

Later that night, Natasha came up to the office, and said that Ben had run away, believing he was going to get bashed up like I had. He had grabbed a backpack he had prepared and had run down the long driveway. Natasha had told Kate to pursue him. Isabelle was in the office with us, and Natasha started hitting me again and shoving me in the chest saying, ‘*everything* is your fault!’

Kate eventually found where Ben was hiding and somehow persuaded him to come back up to the property. Natasha had a conversation with Ben while we were all sitting at our desks. Ben whimpered to Natasha: ‘You just use me for sex.

‘It’s a four-day cycle’, he continued, ‘where you want sex, you use me, and then the next few days are fine until the next morning when you belt me with a stick, and then the cycle begins again. I can always feel it in my stomach when I’m about to get it from you.’

Natasha just scoffed and said, ‘I have a *libido*, Ben.’

He kept going. ‘I’m sick of working all the time and only sleeping three hours a night!’

Natasha turned to Ben and said, ‘Once you tidy up my office,’ she assured him, ‘we can spend more time together like we used to.’

We all went back to work.

The next day I was sore and had a black eye. I was petrified that Natasha would attack me again and I didn’t know what to do. I thought, *I can’t go through this again!*

The printer had run out of toner, and we didn’t have a replacement cartridge. We couldn’t print or photocopy anything which meant we couldn’t complete any accounts paperwork. Ben told Natasha, before calling me on the internal intercom from the house, warning, ‘if Natasha finds out it was *you* who used the last toner and didn’t order another one, she is going to fly up there *in a rage*.’

Ice-cold fear ran through my body. *I can’t handle this*, I thought.

I knew I was not going to be able to bear getting bashed up again. My body and mind were by this point so fragile, I was on a precipice. I argued to myself that I wasn’t in the wrong in this current situation, as I was back in 2000 and 2001. I knew in my heart that I was not lying to anyone and that they were all lying about *me*, including Natasha.

Later that morning I was told I had to go down to Earthly Beauty to do some treatments. I was horrified at the prospect of what people might think of my black eye. Isabelle put some heavy foundation on my face and some blue makeup around my other eye so that it would match. The client I was treating made a comment about women in abusive relationships. Instinctively, I jotted down her phone number from her file, in case I needed it for future reference. Michael’s mother picked me up from the salon to take me home, as I didn’t have

a car that day and she was heading north. I hadn't seen her for years, and I didn't know what she would think when she saw me. She didn't say anything, but I was relieved to see her friendly face.

After a days' reprieve, Natasha came flying up to the office again and started beating me, hitting me with her fists and the palms of her hands. 'You bitch! You fucking con-artist, Carli! You fucking liar, you fucking cunt!'

She grabbed my hair and started pulling it out of my head as she had done so many years before. She dragged me into one of the small offices. Kate tried to get in between us, but Natasha shoved her out of the way and slammed the door firmly behind her.

Natasha threw me to the floor and started kicking the side of my body. Then she pinned me to the ground and leaned close to my face, screaming at me. I saw the *hatred* in her eyes. I thought *this woman actually despises me*. For the first time I realised, *she doesn't have the best intentions for me*, as I had always tried to convince myself.

I finally comprehended that what I'd heard her say one day to Margaret behind my back, that she was "just keeping me around until after the defamation court cases are won", must be true.

After Natasha finished her frenzied attack on me, Dominic came up to the office to hand back the key for the shed after he'd finished mowing. He saw the after-effects of my bashing and my black eye from the incident two days before. Natasha started listing all my downfalls, like she had everyone else's. She claimed that I had conned Isabelle and Dominic to the value of \$6000, by not paying the mortgage for 103.

I tried to defend myself. ‘I had to pay \$2000 to my kids’ day-care or they were going to kick them out, and I had to pay another \$2000 to repair the car.’

‘It’s not true, Dominic,’ said Natasha. ‘Carli doesn’t give a shit about anyone. Carli is completely selfish. She never even cooks a meal for anybody.’

Kate didn’t come forward to say that, in fact, I had been cooking for everyone every night. Natasha then concluded:

‘Let’s face it, Carli is a *human fuck up*.’

What little spirit I had left came crashing to the ground. This comment felt like the ultimate insult I could ever imagine – that I was not worthy to be classified as a human being.

Dominic agreed with Natasha, describing how sad he felt every time he came down to Omaroo and saw the state of my children. While I was standing there with my black eye and my hair strewn across my face and head, I thought about all the lies Natasha was saying and how she was twisting everything so that Dominic couldn’t see my side of the story.

This is Natasha’s fault, I thought. Not mine.

My mind was racing, considering if I really should escape this hell.

From then on, the demands placed on me were increased and I shut my mouth for fear that anything I said would be used against me. I took over most of Kate’s jobs, sweeping outside Natasha’s house every morning from 6am, feeding the chickens and cleaning the pool, all of which took around two hours. At night, I had to do Natasha’s ironing, wash the dinner dishes, vacuum upstairs and downstairs, mop the floor, and clean the three bathrooms. Then it was back up to the office.

During the day, I prepared my kids for school, drove them there, completed the whipper-snipping of all designated

areas, picked up my kids from day-care, rushed home to cook a meal for them and bathed them. The tasks at home were all completed within half an hour. Then I'd head back up to Omaroo to start the accounts again. We slept for two hours, usually, anywhere between 2am and 6am in the morning. I was increasingly *losing it*. I was receiving cold shoulders from every single person around me.

Natasha took her sons down to her parents' house north of Sydney for New Year's Eve. She didn't tell any of us in the office she was leaving. I continued to work diligently on the accounts.

Breaking Point

FEELING VULNERABLE and in a constant state of fear, I began living and breathing in survival mode. I did everything that I was asked without question or complaint. I tried to do everything even more thoroughly than usual as I wanted to keep my children as protected as possible from the retribution, I felt I, and they, were experiencing. Everyone around me continued to give Natasha reports that I wasn't doing anything well enough or quick enough and they were lying about me left, right and centre. There was no one to talk to or anyone from whom to seek any clarity. At home, I tried to talk to my eight-year-old son Sebastian asking him: 'Do you like it here?'

I hated having to ask such questions of my young son, but I had no one else to turn to. He didn't say anything. He knew not to. He was becoming the target of more abuse too, some of which I did not know about at the time.

I was seeing my kids for such a short period of time each day, and they were now being treated like slaves and sub-human too. They had been given menial jobs, like planting seedlings every afternoon after school, and Sebastian had the weekly task of sweeping the 1km driveway every Friday night

with Josh, a job I had personally detested doing. In addition, Natasha had recently stipulated that the Centre remain locked for fear of criminals trying to steal Natasha's course information, or in case Harriette and Sam tried to destroy any evidence for their defamation case. Because I was In The Shit, both me *and* my kids were not allowed to use the toilet in the Centre unless we asked someone to unlock the front door for us. Consequently, my children and I had been going to the toilet in the bush outside, including to defecate. It was humiliating.

On the morning of 8th of January 2010, I was called into Natasha's house. I had been whipper-snipping for four hours on a steep hill by the Centre, and as usual, I was filthy. I hesitantly took off my boots and brushed the excess grass off my clothes. I had been dodging contact with Natasha as much as I could and was trembling at the thought of her hitting me again. When I walked into her kitchen, Kate and Ben were sitting on the barstools at the kitchen table. Natasha announced that she had sat down and calculated that I had actually conned Isabelle and Dominic out of more than \$30,000. This included the mortgage as well as *rent*. 'Carli,' she said, 'you should have been paying rent all along on top of the mortgage payments because Isabelle and Dominic have not been living in the house at 103. *They* have to pay rent for their accommodation elsewhere, and you should have been doing the same.'

She didn't mention the \$500 'interest' I was also paying to her every week.

I was being told that I should have been paying \$1100 per week in total towards 103 and Natasha personally. My logic started to kick in, telling me that what Natasha was expecting me to do was in fact *impossible*. With the Single Mother's pension, plus my Child Support, there would be no money left for food, day-care or any property or office expenses. *How can Natasha expect me to financially manage everything with what she was proposing?*

She then started accusing me again of not doing her accounts properly – and for the demise of her relationship with Ben. I knew, however, that I had spent the last four months doing her accounts perfectly. I had made it my mission to do so. I looked deep into her enraged eyes, and I could see that this woman genuinely believed that *I* was the con artist. This woman, who had used me for all these years, really had no appreciation whatsoever for any of the work I had done for her: personally; in her office; towards her university degree; or for her family. The hours upon hours of hard labour that I had put into her property – to the point where she had said herself, the previous year, ‘the property has never looked so magnificent’.

Now, as I stood in her kitchen, as I had many times before, I *knew* that she did not like me. In fact, she had complete contempt for me. Her parting words to me were: ‘From now on, *no one* is going to talk to you, and you are to follow *all* of Kate's instructions. You'll do as you're told. Now get back to work!’

She repeated to Kate not to have any discussions with me, and to not listen to a word I said.

I left the house thinking *I can't go back up that hill*.

I was physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted.

In that moment, I questioned whether I believed Natasha anymore, about *anything*. Did I actually even like or respect this woman, who I had spent the last thirteen years of my life devoted to? Did my *children* deserve to be imprisoned in this hell hole?

Of course, I thought about Survival, the possibility that I would not survive the earth's changes and that I would die with my children. I thought about all the years I had spent giving everything of myself to Natasha, so that we would be among those who were saved. I remembered that Natasha had once told me that Michael would have to be around in Survival because we would need someone as *strong* as him. I had asked him sheepishly on the day I had my black eye, if he thought he was capable of getting us through Survival on his own, to which he had adamantly said, 'absolutely'. Now, I thought: *Maybe we could survive through the Changes by ourselves, without Natasha.*

My head was throbbing, but I came up with a plan. *I will offer Kate an ultimatum*, I thought. *I will tell Kate that if she doesn't go into the house and tell Natasha the truth immediately – that she is lying, and that I am working hard every day – then I am going to leave.*

I held my breath and waited for Kate to come out of the Centre. As she opened the door, I presented her with my ultimatum.

She brushed past me saying 'Natasha told me not to speak to you.'

I paused and decided *OK. I have to do this now.*

What I had contemplated so many times before, I was *actually doing*. I passed Josh who was sitting on one of the church pews outside the Centre and said guiltily: 'I'm sorry Josh. Your mum has been lying about me.'

I was trying to express with my eyes and without words, that it had nothing to do with him and that I was sorry to be leaving him in such a dreadful place. I drove down the hill and started packing.

The whole time I was in the house I thought that someone would come down to stop me. I collected every single valuable thing I could fit into the car, including my large box of photos, some clothes for the boys and cherished mementos. I drove to Murwillumbah and collected Sebastian from Vacation Care before picking up Jacob and Hamish from day-care. The teachers told me that Hamish was still sleeping so Sebastian and I decided to buy some hot chips and sit on the grass overlooking Cabarita Beach while we waited. I asked him in the car: 'Do you want to leave?' 'Do you think this is the best place for us?'

We both spoke in broken sentences, fearful of what the other may relay back to Natasha. We came to the conclusion that we would just move out of 103, and that I would stipulate that I would work at Omaroo *during the day*, but *not* the night. We both knew that what we had decided was unrealistic, but we felt brighter.

As we sat quietly and ate, staring out to the ocean, suddenly we turned to look into each other's eyes. We smiled... and then we laughed.

'We're free!' I exclaimed.

It was the most amazing, incredible feeling in the world! I felt free for the first time in over thirteen years, and my son, free for the first time in his *entire life*.

Seek truth and you will find a path.

Frank G. Slaughter

PART 2

RECOVERY

Realisation

IT WAS ONLY once Sebastian and I had picked up Jacob and Hamish, and we went to see Michael at his work, that a lightbulb went off inside my head. At first, I told Michael: ‘Sebastian and I have discussed what we’re going to do. I’m only going to work at Omaroo during the day and we’re going to move out of 103 and live somewhere else, so we’re not so close.’

‘You are not going back! Ever!’ he said. ‘You can go and stay at my mum’s place until we sort out what we’re going to do.’

As we talked and talked for over an hour, standing outside his workplace, I began to see the magnitude of everything I had experienced. I began to filter the thoughts and endless doubts I had brushed aside for the last thirteen-and-a-half years. In a matter of minutes, with clearer thoughts, and away from the clutches of Natasha and her increasingly paranoid world, I began to realise that she *was* a cult leader, and I *had* been part of a cult.

I began to think about the way Natasha manipulated every situation and twisted every word that came out of our mouths to make us feel we were in the wrong, that we were liars and bad people. I thought about the fact that Natasha

turned everyone against each other – divide and conquer – so that no one could trust each other, nor rely on one another. We always looked to her for advice, only to be steered in completely disadvantageous directions. She turned every single couple against each other, so that in the end, almost no PMC couple's relationship had survived intact. She kept us dangling on promises of a future that did not exist, under the guise that she knew all, that she was someone special.

I realised I ultimately made the decision to leave, however clumsily, because I would rather have died in Survival, than watch my children become slaves as well, and I wanted to spend the next two years enjoying spending time with them. In the end, my current circumstances were worse than the possibility of death.

Michael sent us off to his mother's.

The next day we received a message from Natasha on Michael's mobile saying: "I don't really mind what you and Carli do, but it's not fair to take Sebastian out of the area he has grown up in all his life. Could you please give me a call as I have to make some very clear decisions now".

We didn't respond.

Harassment

WE DECIDED TO hire a truck and collect our belongings from 103. I told Michael I wanted to do it in the middle of the night, when Kate would be up at the office, so that no one would disturb us. Michael disagreed, saying it would be fine to do it during the day on Sunday.

My heart was pounding as we drove closer to the house. Thankfully, Michael had brought along a friend from his work, who was strong and looked like he wouldn't put up with any nonsense, to help carry the furniture while I packed everything up.

When we arrived, the locks on both the front and back doors had been changed. Michael had to break in through the toilet window. I raced around, frantically packing up the kitchen, while Michael and his friend packed up the living room. The house was a mess, and I was embarrassed that Michael's friend was seeing it in such a state. I thought, *he must think I'm a pig!*

By 2pm my worst nightmare was realised, when Ben, Kate and Sarah drove down the hill and started harassing us. Ben filmed us on his mobile, threatening: 'We're going to report you to the police for trespassing!'

He kept within a metre of us, following us around, while Kate tried to look intimidating, and Sarah just stood there awkwardly. Natasha called Ben on his phone. We could hear her screaming down the other end, *'Ben, hand the phone to Mick, I want to talk to him!'*

We could hear everything as she continued to screech down the line. We hurriedly packed into the truck whatever we could grab. Natasha was *losing it* and I hoped to hell that she wouldn't come down to the house to attack us. The only saving grace, I thought, was that Michael's friend was there. He was a good witness to the bizarre antics that were going on.

Natasha was screaming: *'Carli is a liar, Mick!'* ... *'Carli owes a lot of people a lot of money.'* ... *'Carli is manipulating you, Mick, as she is scrambling for money.'* ... *'Do you know Carli doesn't have a license?'* (They had seen a letter of mine I had left behind saying my license was suspended).

Natasha was using as many tactics as she could to convince Michael to believe that he should listen to *her*, and not be manipulated by *me*. But this strategy was no longer working on him. Nor was it on me.

She was the one scrambling for money right now. She was panicking about how she was going to keep her properties and finances afloat now that one more person had jumped ship – now there would be no more free labour from Carli (or Michael) to support her.

We eventually filled up the truck with as much as we could, leaving the three bedrooms with furniture, clothes, cherished books, toys, and other personal items we had no time, nor state of mind to collect. We were fearful of leaving

the house untidy due to any legal rental agreement that may be held against us so we left a note saying that Michael would return at a more convenient time to collect the rest of our things and clean the house.

As we drove away, I said to Michael, 'I don't want to go back.'

'No, I'll do it,' he said. 'I'm not scared of them.'

~

We received a text from Isabelle about a week later, stating that we had to call her to make a time to clean the house at 103 and mow all the lawns so that it would be up to scratch to re-rent. I thought, *how dare they demand that we mow the lawns and clean the property after we have left, when Natasha never gave me, nor Kate, the decency to allow us time to maintain the property ourselves while I was actually living there!*

This demand was too much, and out of principle we made the decision to leave the rest of our belongings behind and never return.

Soon after, I received a call from Byron Bay police, who said they'd received a statement from Dominic that I had stolen his car. The day I had left, Dominic was organising to sign over the registration into my name. I argued with the police officer that that I had been *given* the car.

He said, 'I'm afraid, Ms McConkey, you have to return the car to Arcadia Guesthouse at Byron Bay within the next 24 hours.'

The police sergeant seemed to know exactly what was going on, and at the end of the phone call, added: 'It's not worth the trouble, luv. Just return the car and get on with your lives.'

I cleared out the car and found one of Natasha's work diaries in the glove compartment. It was a diary from 2009, which had no work-related appointments in it, only appointments for all her beauty and corrective dental treatments. There were business cards for her plastic surgeon and notes on the youth elixirs she regularly consumed. I was enraged at the thought of all our hard work and money going towards her efforts to maintain her youthful appearance.

I also found a gun permit, made out in the name of Natasha's son, Justin. It was a pistol license for the duration of three months. I thought, *why on earth would the Council give him a gun licence? The rifle licence they all had was bad enough. They weren't even living on an actual farm. Didn't the authorities know who they were dealing with?*

I parked the car in a side street near the Guesthouse. I left the key in the ignition, as I thought it would be easier to find. Dominic left a message citing how dumb I was. I felt like an idiot.

Over the next few weeks, I was highly anxious, fretting that there would be further repercussions for my leaving. I changed my mobile number. Michael still received other texts and phone messages. I begged him not to tell me when he received them, but each time he felt he should, and my chest would tighten at every word. Isabelle left a message for Michael, reiterating that I was a liar and a con-artist and that I was manipulating him for his money. Again, the statement,

“Carli owes a lot of people a lot of money”. It made me so angry that Natasha was projecting her own actions onto me.

When we had still not replied to any communication, Michael received a voice message from Ben apologising for the way I was treated in the office regarding the accounts and admitting that it was all *his* fault. He said he now took responsibility for them, and they needed me to come back.

After no response from us, another message was left by Natasha, about a month and a half later, saying, “as a friend, I’m calling to say that the NSW police are after Carli in relation to Jenny and she should give me a call”.

I went into a state of panic, believing that Natasha had dobbed me into the police for burning Jenny’s house down. Michael reassured me that Natasha couldn’t do anything to us, that we had done nothing wrong. ‘She can’t sue us for anything, and we don’t have any money.’

He added: ‘she will create her own undoing.’

Starting Again

MICHAEL AND I got back together virtually straight after I left Natasha's. We didn't move very far, staying in the area due to Michael's work, at Cabarita Beach. We found a cosy two-bedroom house with a small garden. We transferred Sebastian to a new school and met some lovely neighbours. Frequently, I would be worried I'd see our ex-cult members' cars on the road or their faces in the local shopping centre. I had to take Sebastian to soccer matches in Burringbar and passed by Hunter Street a few times. One day I saw a sign saying a garage sale would be held at 103 on the weekend and I suspected they were selling all our stuff. With great pleasure, I noted it was pouring rain on the morning of the sale and knew they would have sold very little.

After I escaped, it took at least three months before I convinced myself that Natasha and the others at Omaroo were not going to come and try to kill me. Every night I would dream about Natasha or Omaroo. I dreamt most frequently that it was *me* who was bashing Natasha; or Natasha would be telling me what to do and I would say "no, I'm not going to do that". A couple of times I dreamt that I had chopped her into tiny pieces.

For the first six to twelve months, I talked incessantly to Michael, for hours each day and through the night, trying to get my head (and his) around what had happened to us. I was terrified in social settings. I dreaded meeting people and talking to them as I felt I had nothing to say. I couldn't talk about the last thirteen years of my life, so what was there to talk about?

I was completely physically and emotionally exhausted and I had to sleep *a lot*. I found that I could carry out everyday tasks for weeks and then suddenly, I would crash and literally could not move my body for days. I regularly got depressed, and it came in waves where I felt like I couldn't cope and the words *I want to kill myself* coursed through my brain on rapid repeat. I learnt to accept the thoughts and feelings and realised in time that they would eventually pass. I kept my children at the forefront of my mind and reassured myself that I needed to experience the pain and emotion and be gentle with myself until I felt better again, which usually took a few days.

Initially, I didn't want to call my mum and dad, as I felt so guilty about what I had done to them. It was Michael who nudged me to make the first call and re-open the severed communication lines. When I spoke to my mum for the first time, she was overcome with joy and relief that we had left our dangerous situation. She was fully supportive. My dad, by now, was almost deaf, and couldn't understand my words over the phone. I could hear the choked-up tears in his voice when he said: "We love you and we've missed you".

Education

I DISCOVERED THAT Mum and Dad had been regularly attending CIFS, the Cult Information and Family Support group that I had heard mum mention on the ill-fated day when they had dropped me to the airport, after which point, I had cut off contact with them. Mum said that CIFS had been their lifeline, especially after the final separation, my AVOs, and Natasha's court case against them. (Natasha eventually dropped the lawsuit, once my parents said there was no evidence and threatened to sue her for all costs). Numerous families attended CIFS, all of whom had been torn apart by cults: parents separated from their children; siblings, nieces and nephews lost to cults in Australia or overseas. CIFS had been operating for twenty years providing support for ex-cult members and their loved ones.

My parents told Michael and I about an upcoming Cult Conference that CIFS QLD had organised. It would be held up at Brisbane Parliament House. An amazing woman, Wendy, and a few of the ex- members from my cult, including Sam and Harriette (who were still being sued for defamation by Natasha) were on the committee. My parents were thrilled that we would have the opportunity to attend and begin our

recovery process. My Dad booked and paid for tickets for Michael and myself. It was held in March, seven weeks after the kids and I had left. Mum and Dad came with us. Although Dad couldn't hear very well, he was happy to be there supporting us.

There were around sixty cults represented at the Conference. Ex-cult members and family and friends gathered to hear from speakers including politicians, psychologists, and other ex-cult members. Three psychologists, who had been in cults themselves, had travelled out from the United States. They were now counselling others and were experts in their field. To meet so many people who had had similar experiences was phenomenal. It was the best and most critical step in the beginning of my recovery.

The American psychologists taught us about the process of indoctrination. They showed us that all cults use very similar techniques and that all cult leaders spruik similar claims, including that they are the Prophet, Messiah, Jesus Christ reincarnated, or have a direct line with God. It was astounding to realise how many cults are out there, in Australia and overseas, and that they operate almost identically. At one stage, we were offered to attend an ex-cult-member-only session in another room, where we could discuss openly and in a safe space the thoughts and feelings, we were all experiencing. It was an eye-opener, and I was able to express a lot of the anger and resentment I felt at the time.

Simply being told that there are thousands of other cult leaders in the world who say and do exactly the same things that Natasha did made us realise that everything is calculated, premeditated, and most importantly, *not our fault*. We learnt

about the effects of trauma and were told that on a daily basis we would probably be alternating between states of hyper arousal and feeling numb, with symptoms of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We learnt about triggers, which are thoughts or memories that can happen at any time of the day or night, when we simply see, hear or smell something that takes us back to a moment in time, back in the cult.

I was interested to learn that the majority of cult leaders are charismatic narcissists with an anti-social, histrionic, or borderline personality disorder, and that most are deemed to be psychopaths. I subsequently looked up the definition of a psychopath. I read that the only way to deal with a psychopath is to lock them up in jail or have them admitted to a psychiatric institution, as the more they receive counselling or psychological therapy, the more they learn to manipulate.

Opportunity for Truth

AT THE END of the Conference, due to our connection with the CIFS committee members, my mum, Michael, and I were fortunate enough to attend a dinner with the psychologists and an investigative journalist, Michael Bachelard. Michael Bachelard worked for *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne and had given a speech at the Conference. He had also written a book on an extreme Christian cult operating in England and Australia and in other parts of the world, a cult which also separates families at alarming levels. I sat next to Michael Bachelard, and as the night progressed, we discussed my story. He said he would be interested in interviewing me for an article and said to give him a call if I felt comfortable coming forward about my experience.

Whenever I spoke to my Michael about my desire to do something to stop Natasha, to help those still under her control, he would say, ‘they have to work it out for themselves. You can’t make them see the truth.’

I hadn’t wanted to believe it, but I knew that it had taken me two more years after Michael had left for good to contemplate leaving myself. The American psychologists gave similar advice. ‘The most important thing is to look after

yourselves and move on with your life,' they said, 'and let others make their own decisions, given time.'

I, however, was determined to do as much as I could, to help as many people get out of my cult as possible.

~

Throughout the few months after leaving the cult, I was frantic about the fact that Josh, Kate's son, now around fifteen years old, was still in there. I emailed his father, explaining the reality of the situation that Kate and Josh were in. I implored him to do something about it. I received a polite thankyou email and didn't believe he would take any action. But, unbeknownst to me until years later, Josh's dad flew in from overseas, went down to 103, and virtually kidnapped Josh. It devastated his mother. However, Josh ended up finishing school at a nurturing boarding school, close to his grandparents in Queensland. He has gone on to live a happy and successful life. I'm so grateful that Josh's father got him out of there before further damage could be done.

As time went on, I thought about Michael Bachelard's offer to write an article. I thought, *this is my chance to tell the truth, and for those still stuck in our cult, including Kate, Sarah, and Isabelle, to hopefully read the article and have further seeds of doubt planted about what they are involved in.*

I knew that Natasha would make them read the article and create an opposing narrative to my story, which might plant some seeds of doubt and encourage them to question

their circumstances, think for themselves, and ultimately want to escape too.

I sat down in front of my computer and for four days straight, typed out my story from beginning to end. It was a distressing process to say the least. My children kept coming up to me and saying, ‘you smell mum.’ ‘What’s wrong mum, you look terrible!’

I knew it was the sludge of my traumatic memories pouring out all over the place.

Some months after finishing my lengthy account, I met up with Michael Bachelard in Melbourne, while we were down there visiting Roger and Heather. He interviewed me in a Chinese restaurant over yum cha. As I spoke to him, I jumped from one thought to another, one event to the next. I felt like I was all over the place. I was glad I had typed up the story so that he could take it away with him and read it in a chronological, logical fashion. He had a photographer take a photo of us in front of the old Melbourne Gaol, which we all thought was appropriate. We had had little money to spend on a new wardrobe and so I was wearing a second-hand jacket I had bought at Vinnies, which I was embarrassed about, but everyone agreed that it, too, was appropriate.

Michael began writing. After he had the gist of the article completed and had spoken to both Kate and Sarah for fair comment, he told me that he would be calling Natasha, to gain her side of the story. He was reluctant to visit Omaroo upon Sarah and Kate’s invitation, for fear of what trap he may fall into.

I received a missed call from Michael a few days later. When I eventually got onto him, he was rattled, high pitched, and apologetic. Despite the fact that Michael had listened receptively to my story, face-to-face for three hours, and he had read the eighty-six pages I had typed for him, sure enough, when he called Natasha for an interview to express her views, his brain was so smashed after his one-hour telephone conversation with her, that he doubted what I had told him and questioned whether I was telling the truth!

Michael told me that after he had spoken to Natasha, that he had tried to call me, and when he couldn't get hold of me, he called up Sam, who he had met at the CIFS Conference, in desperation, to help straighten out his head. The Walkley Award-winning journalist had been conned by the master manipulator, just like the rest of us had! It only took a sixty-minute conversation over the phone. Michael recounted that Natasha had cried mercilessly, begging him repeatedly to not do what countless others had done before me, which was to try and destroy her life, simply because she had pointed out the truth of our sordid, dysfunctional lives and we wanted revenge.

I couldn't believe that he could doubt my obviously honest and lengthy account. It did, however, make me feel not so stupid for having fallen for Natasha's lies and manipulation over the thirteen years I had spent under her spell.

After the hurdle of Natasha's manipulation attempt, and after Michael realised what had happened, we worked together to ensure that the article was factual and would not contain anything that could not be proven in a court of law.

My father was eager to state in plain English in an email to Michael: ‘Be aware that *she will sue*. There is no doubt about it and be ready.’

Dad also stated that in the event of a court case, he wanted me to be covered by Fairfax for all costs. He didn’t receive an answer back.

After the article was cleared by Fairfax’s legal department, it was published in *The Age* on 17 October 2010. It covered a double page spread in the Extra section, accompanied by a second article stating that Natasha was a registered Psychologist, practicing on vulnerable patients. The articles were also published online on the *Sydney Morning Herald* website.

Soon after this, Wendy, the President of CIFS QLD, who had coordinated the life-changing inaugural Cult Conference in Brisbane, contacted me, and said a journalist from the *Gold Coast Bulletin* called Anne-Louise Brown had approached her for stories on cults. Wendy suggested that I may be interested. Initially Anne-Louise said she would do a similar story on me to that published in *The Age*, but then she asked my Michael if he would recount his experiences in the cult to provide a different angle. After careful deliberation, Michael and I decided that he should do it. We hadn’t been served any legal documentation from Natasha on my article, and we thought that his story should definitely also be told.



The Boys' first Christmas in Sydney with their Grandparents



Hamish and me at my Cousin's Wedding, 2010

Relationship Breakdown

THROUGHOUT THE PUBLISHING of the articles and the tumultuous year since the kids and I had left, Michael and I were making an effort with our relationship. Michael had been a godsend: I was able to talk to him about every thought, feeling and response I had had to our shared experience. We would talk and talk, expressing our anger, humiliation, grief, and rage. However, every night I would be scared to spend time with him alone after the kids had gone to bed. I didn't want to have sex with him. Coupled with this, our son, Hamish, who I had not spent nights with for the first two years of his life, would hop out of bed and come into our room to cuddle and sleep with me. I understood this as making up for all the nights he had spent alone, crying out for his mother who never came.

I eventually also thought I'd better find a job. I felt guilty not working, but I was terrified of seeking employment. I came out of the cult believing that I was stupid and useless, and that I would have to work on the front counter of McDonalds for the rest of my life. After Michael's work packing shelves for over ten years, and my hard work on the property, our backs were not in good shape. We began seeing

a chiropractor. I gained the courage to ask the Receptionist if there was any casual work available in their office. It happened that there was, and I began working part-time on the front desk. As I became more comfortable in the job and my self-esteem rose, I realised I was looking at other men. I was scared to be alone with Michael and questioned, *what is the point of continuing like this, for his sake and mine?*

I had made so many mistakes in the past. Our relationship had been poked and prodded and manipulated by Natasha for so many years.

It was extremely difficult, but I decided to end our relationship for good. We subsequently had some very heated arguments. The experience of aggression and shouting that had been fraught in our years in the cult was still boiling underneath and came to the surface. It was clear that we did not feel love for each other at this point; we felt more contempt than compassion. We had too many traumatic memories to be able to break them down and rebuild our relationship to a healthy level.

It also dawned on me how I had been treating my children. We had been taught by Natasha to smack our children with wooden spoons. One night I hit Hamish on his bottom and left a red mark. I couldn't believe what I was doing. *A two-year-old doesn't deserve this abuse!*

I vowed I would never hit my children again. I knew what the effect of physical abuse had had on me, and I didn't want to inflict that on another human being, let alone my own defenceless children.

In January 2011, one year after the kids and I had escaped, I broke it off with Michael. Before I left Natasha's clutches, Michael had had a girlfriend he'd met at work, and had enjoyed the freedom it brought him. I believe us coming out and him having to become a full-time husband and father again had been difficult for him. The kids and I moved into a unit at Casuarina Beach. It was expensive, but I managed to afford it with the Single Mother's pension I received from the government and spent little on anything other than rent and food. The unit was in a holiday resort with two large swimming pools, and we had a plunge pool out the back of our apartment. It was the sort of luxurious environment I felt my children deserved, after the horrific experience they had lived through for the majority of their young lives.

Michael said that he would have the children over at his place for two days a week. On those days, I would mostly sleep and clean the house. But soon, two days turned into one, and Michael would come late to pick up the kids and bring them back earlier than expected. Eventually, the kids were with him for less than twenty-four hours. He would give me the excuse that he had gone to sleep on his friend's couch the night before and slept in, and would not answer his phone, which I would call incessantly whenever he didn't show up. I became increasingly agitated.

I spoke to my mum about what was happening, and one day, she said: 'Why don't you move back down to Sydney?'

I was feeling so desperately tired and lonely, and frustrated with Michael. I thought that moving would also give me better opportunities to find a good job in the city, so I decided to do it. I asked Michael if I could take the kids down

to Sydney, while they could come and visit him in the school holidays. He agreed. It solidified my decision that the kids and I were better off moving away, far from the memories of that place, from the fear of bumping into anyone from the cult, toward a better and brighter future.

Coming Home

WHEN WE ARRIVED in Sydney, it was a huge relief. My parents were now living in North Sydney, so I checked out all the schools in the surrounding area. I needed to rely on my parents for some support and felt that at least they would provide more than Michael did at the time. I decided on a school after talking to some local parents during school drop-off. I then found a unit in the same street as the school, which was cheap and old, but adequate. My dad offered to pay some rent in advance, and I signed a twelve-month lease to convince the landlord to allow a single mother with three young children into a small, two-bedroom townhouse.

During the next few months, the kids began school, and I thought more about what had happened and what the future looked like for us. I had left Sydney when I was twenty-four years old, at the beginning of my career. Now I had come back at almost thirty-seven years old, with nothing to show for my time away. I was a wreck, physically and emotionally. I was so tired; I would have to sleep during the day. I felt overwhelmed by the outside world on a daily basis. I was scared to make friends, to even talk to people. I saw my old friends from high school a few times, but I was so messed up

and mentioned scenarios of the past thirteen years which proved too much for them to fathom. It was difficult for them to deal with me, so before long, we stopped contact.

I relied on the support of my parents, and ex-cult members at CIFS meetings, which I attended with my mother every two months. It would help to talk to others who had come from similar circumstances, as well as give advice to parents and friends of people still stuck in cults.

I decided it was time I wrote a Police Statement and sent a Complaint to the Psychology Board. I also thought about getting compensation for the years I had worked without pay and investigated the possibility of applying to sue for lost wages to Fair Work Australia.

When I typed up a Police Statement and took it down to North Sydney police station, I gave the officer on duty a 1cm-thick document. He subsequently cut it down to less than a one-page summary. He asked me to read the report to make sure he had all the facts straight before he put it on file. I asked if he wanted to keep the larger document I had prepared and he said, ‘well, we can keep it, but it won’t really be of much use. We will keep a record of your statement on our system and have the police up North follow up and get back to you.’

I also wrote a lengthy Complaint about my experience and sent it to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) QLD (connected to the Psychology Board of Australia). I had been told others had sent in Complaints about Natasha, which had been investigated in 2008/9, but nothing had come of it. I stipulated on the form that I wanted my name to be kept confidential. I later discovered that they

had disregarded my request and had given Natasha my name and a full copy of the document I had submitted. I found this out because Natasha posted a copy of the document on one of the websites on which she defended herself.

In time, I received a letter from the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) which stated: “I met with the Psychology Council’s Assessment Committee on 5 April 2011 when it was decided that the conduct referred to in your complaint occurred before Ms Lakaev was registered as a psychologist. No complaints about her conduct have been reported after her registration that would require further action. The NSW Police is the more appropriate body to deal with your allegations about physical assault by Ms Lakaev”.

I was incredulous at what they had written and that they would take no action.

I called up the HCCC’s office and demanded to know why they had given Natasha my name and my Complaint. A representative said that it was a stipulation that the party complained against had the right of reply to the accusations. I cried, *‘why didn’t you ask me first?’*

I felt just as helpless when a Gold Coast police officer told me over the phone that they were ceasing to act on my police report, as they’d been informed by Natasha that there was a court case pending, and that they didn’t want to get caught up in the intricacies of the disputes between our two parties.

I submitted a Fair Work application, hoping that this would achieve something. I listed all the money I had spent, all the jobs I had completed, and the number of hours I had worked, including the overtime I had calculated. In the end, I

had to withdraw my application because they said I did not have any proof of working for Natasha, such as an employment contract or a signed tax file declaration form.

I felt betrayed by the authorities I was supposed to trust and rely upon. Each step I took to seek justice, or even simply receive an acknowledgement of the abuse I had suffered, ended up being thrown back in my face. I realised that victims certainly don't get a fair go, not even in this supposed *lucky country*.

Defamation

THE THREAT OF being sued by Natasha hung over all of us. Michael Bachelard told us that a defamation suit could only be filed within one year of the written publication, otherwise Natasha would be “out of time”. This was the section of law that Sam and Harriette were using to defend their case against Natasha in the courts, as she had commenced proceedings against them after the twelve-month cut-off period.

It had been almost one year to the day, when Michael was handed the defamation writ by an agent whilst he was at work. Michael called me and said that Fairfax had been served as well. My stomach turned inside out. I was sick with worry. He said Natasha was suing Fairfax Ltd, News Limited, the journalists Michael Bachelard and Anne-Louise Brown, and Michael and myself, for the sum of \$850,000. Among other reasons given, the lawsuit was for defaming and humiliating her and causing her reputation as a psychologist to be harmed, leading to the loss of her position at the Health Service where she worked on the Gold Coast. She was also suing for lost wages.

I was determined not to get tracked down by Natasha’s private investigator, or to at least make it difficult for him.

Already I had kept my telephone number silent in the White Pages. We knew her agent was trying to find me as my parents' phone number and address details were listed publicly, and they had received numerous phone calls asking for my details. One day a man called and said: 'I have a package to deliver for a Ms Carli McConkey, could you please pass on her address?'

I was sharing my dad's car as I could not afford to buy my own and was careful to always park downstairs in the garage of my parents' apartment building. I was constantly paranoid and would on occasion think that someone was following me. I would turn down random streets to try and lose them. However, after about six months of being careful, there came one night when it was late, and I was tired while dropping the car back. Instead of parking the car downstairs through the security gate, I parked it out on the street. A man ran up to me with a desperate look on his face and handed me the court papers. I had known it was inevitable, but a wave of terror ran through me. The fight had begun.

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It was a slow and arduous process, waiting for the phone calls from Fairfax and News Limited's solicitors, informing me of the next step in the court procedures. First, we had to provide a detailed response to the Particulars that Natasha had claimed in her defamation writ – the thirty or so points she had made to refute the articles' contents. I spent hours going through the thirty-page document, typing detailed accounts of why each sentence in *The Age*/Fairfax newspaper articles was true,

giving facts and direct quotes. Michael had to reply regarding the *Gold Coast Bulletin/News Limited* article's Particulars, which were slightly different. It was a highly traumatic process, which I had to undergo repeatedly, in the toing and froing between the solicitors and myself.

At first, one of the Partners of the law firm who represented News Limited, Jack, worked on our case. He then handed the reigns over to his colleague, Matt. Jack and Matt listened to my story with compassion and I trusted them. I felt they were both highly intelligent and experienced, and although it was a complicated case, they were willing to put in effort to understand all the bizarre and beyond-belief events that had happened. The Fairfax solicitor, Greta, who was the person defending my article on behalf of *The Age*, was in contact with me less, but I felt safe in the hands of Jack and Matt.

When we received a Request for Further and Better Particulars from Natasha's Solicitor, I had to give more detail in support of my initial Defence document, stating during what period events had occurred and who inside the cult had witnessed the incidents. Our Solicitors and the Barrister who would be defending each of us in court were mostly interested in who witnessed the physical assaults. I was told that it would be difficult to prove the psychological abuse. I couldn't understand why when I believed I had an abundance of evidence to prove it.

Lobbying to Government

DURING 2001, WHILE I was still up North, I had been asked to give a speech on my experience at CIFS QLD. Once I was in Sydney, I was asked to do the same for CIFS NSW. I was proud to share my story of survival with the small groups, though it was difficult to squash thirteen years into a twenty-minute speech. I wanted to convey as much as possible about the process of mind control, and how difficult recovery can be, to those who were family and friends of cult members still in their cult, and to those who had been lucky enough to escape. The reception I received was encouraging and supportive.

CIFS QLD's President, Wendy, was still pursuing avenues to persuade the Australian Government to change laws and take action on the abuse of cults. She organised another conference, this time at Canberra Parliament House. She gave each of us the names of Ministers who were in our state electorate and federally, and we each wrote to the Ministers and Senators, calling for amendments to Australian Criminal Law to include psychological abuse as a criminal offence. She helped set up interviews with the parliamentarians who were open to listening to our stories, and we hoped they would act.

The Conference was incredible, giving each of us hope that something might change in regard to cults in our society. Michael Bachelard also attended and gave a speech vowing to continue his work to uncover the deceit of cults and their leaders. It was great to see him again. Each of us saw him as a crusader defending our cause, even though he had not experienced the horrors himself. As we sat next to each other again at dinner that night, deliberating over our angst of the court case, he remarked to those at the table, that if there was one thing he had learnt, it was that anyone, anywhere, can get caught up in a cult if they're vulnerable, and in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As part of the promotion for discussions and outcomes of the Canberra Conference, Wendy set up an interview for me and a cult expert from the Jewish community on ABC's Radio National. Because I was now in a court case, I refrained from mentioning Natasha's name or her organisation, but spoke about my experiences and the after-effects. I was very shy and nervous.

Soon after, I received a call from Michael Bachelard, who said a publisher had called to see if I was interested in writing a book. She had heard me on Radio National. I gave her a call and sent her the eighty-six pages of ramblings which I had given Michael the previous year. I waited for her to call me back, hoping that this would be an opportunity to share the story and get the truth out to the world. I told the publisher that I was undergoing a defamation case, but I assured her that everything would work out and we would win. I said there would be plenty of witnesses and my story was all true.

She got back to me a few months later and apologised, saying that if they were looking at it a few years earlier it

would have been fine, but the publishing industry was now quite fragile, and they couldn't risk being sued. She said she had done her best to convince the publisher panel, but in the end, had not succeeded. She made the comment that the story was mostly about Natasha, not me. She said it would be better to focus on the story in relation to workplace bullying and the like. At the time, I questioned, *why wouldn't it be all about Natasha? My life revolved around her and what she did to me!*

I felt assured that at least I had gained some interest and figured that I would approach her again after the court case was over. I was determined to win.

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To dispel the content of the newspaper articles, Natasha did what she had done in retaliation to the blogs that appeared about her in 2007: began publishing content on websites. She called them "In Support of Natasha Lakaev", "Harassment of Universal Knowledge", and "Almanac on Natasha Lakaev". She created webpages entitled "Ridiculousness of Carli McConkey", "The Truth from the Housemate of Carli McConkey" and "Narcissistic Borderline Couples" – referring to Michael and myself. She posted photographs of our family at celebrations like Christmas and Easter smiling and looking happy. It made me so angry, as they were photos taken on the few days we actually had off within the entire year... Of course we were happy!

Knowing that all the information and photos were online made me more anxious that I wouldn't be able to get a job, when eventually I felt ready to apply for one.

Public Speaking

DURING 2012, WENDY organised another Cult Conference at Brisbane Parliament House. This time the marketing was targeted at psychologists, psychiatrists, and any other practitioners who wanted to gain a better understanding of the cult phenomenon and learn how to better support ex-cult members. She asked me if I would like to present my story. I was flattered and edited the speech I had presented at the CIFS meetings, adding some further insights from my recovery to that point. Senator Nick Xenophon was there and gave a speech directly after me. While on the podium, he commented on my court case and said, ‘if you ever need any help, I’m also a lawyer, so please get in contact.’

I appreciated his acknowledgement and offer of support.

Leading up to this Conference, there had been a lot of activity on the internet by Natasha. She had published more content deriding Michael and I, as well as creating defamatory posts about Michael Bachelard. She had also been able to retrieve the mailing list of all those who attended the Cult Conference in 2010. With this list, she began sending out emails to everyone attaching “evidence” against us. A lot of the emails were from Dominic or Natasha’s still current

partner, Ben. Dominic wrote in one email that my father had molested me. My father was mortally offended and embarrassed and wrote back saying that this was not the case, and that this had been by the native PNG teenager. The content of the emails also stated that my father had paid for Michael and me to attend the first conference. My father replied to the email saying that he had not paid for us to attend. The fact was, however, that my father *had* paid for us to attend, and Natasha had the evidence to prove it. Before long, a copy of a CIFS QLD bank statement was posted online showing the deposit made in 2010 by my father. We all wondered how she could have got her hands on that information, as well as the mailing list. I told Dad that it was a lesson for him never to lie, even though he was trying to protect me, as it would always come back and bite him – especially where Natasha was concerned!

I met one of the psychologists who was attending the Conference, and who was now Vice President of CIFS QLD. After my speech, he came up to me, congratulated me, and commented on my experience. I felt very uneasy in his presence and at his direct line of questioning regarding Natasha. I couldn't put my finger on what it was that made me suspicious of him. At one point in the conference, we were invited to break up into groups of ex-cult members and family and friends, as we had in 2010. Wendy invited this psychologist, who had never been in a cult, to come into our safe space. I was aghast, and wondered why he had been allowed to be invited in.

Some days later, I received a call from the same psychologist on my mobile. He began asking me questions

about Natasha: specifically, about my court case, and that of Harriette and Sam. Immediately, alarm bells went off in my head. I told him that I was unable to talk about it and hung up. I called Wendy and asked how he had got hold of my phone number. ‘Sorry, Carli,’ she said. ‘I thought you wouldn’t mind. He asked for it and I gave it to him.’

My mind raced back to the time when Natasha had been undertaking her Psychology degree and she had mentioned a male friend who was doing the course with her. I asked Wendy: ‘How long has this guy been on the CIFS QLD Committee?’

‘About 18 months,’ she said.

I became convinced that he was a spy of Natasha’s, planted into CIFS QLD to gain information on us to be used in Natasha’s court cases.

Not long after this, CIFS QLD imploded. Several issues could not be resolved, and each member had their own theory as to why the organisation collapsed. In my mind, I knew it was Natasha behind it all: she had sent in her spy to create havoc. To this day, the group is no more, and only CIFS NSW is still going strong.

Counselling

I KNEW I needed to see a counsellor, but I didn't have enough money to pay for one. A friend from CIFS, a psychologist whose daughter was trapped in a cult, said she knew of a free service in my local area. I was grateful for her recommendation and commenced attending a session once a week. It was difficult to discuss my past, as I didn't feel the counsellor understood what had happened to me. She had not been exposed to cults previously, so I had to explain the process of mind control and felt like a weirdo relaying all the bizarre things that had taken place and the twisted mind of my perpetrator.

It was worthwhile, however, to articulate all the thoughts racing around in my head. I had many neuroses I was still trying to deal with, like having to wash my hands constantly and spraying disinfectant on everything I believed was dirty, which was a lot. I was paranoid about hygiene, and would never wear a piece of clothing twice, as I believed it would have the negative energy of the day before. I wanted each day to be fresh and better than the last. I also found that once I'd finished preparing paperwork for the court case, it had brought up so much trauma that I had to throw out all the clothes I had

been wearing that day. I didn't want to be wasteful, but I also didn't want to give them to charity, because I was worried about other people being subjected to the energy that lingered on the clothes. I would also give away any of my belongings which were a reminder of the cult. When I experienced triggers, I would often cry, letting myself feel the emotion as much as I could. I believed this would bring me closer to full recovery, as each memory and emotion was cleared from my mind and body.

I found that I could keep going at full capacity – working on the court case, cooking, cleaning, looking after my children, dealing with the trauma – but every so often my body would collapse, and I wouldn't be able to move. I would then have to see a massage therapist to get my body functioning again.

I met with the counsellor for about eight months, until one day, when I was talking about the court case, she made the comment: 'Things don't always work out how you want them to.'

My brain froze. Once it recalibrated, I decided never to go back to her again. Although she was a nice person and meant well, I couldn't risk any shadow of doubt creeping into my psyche, which could compromise my focus on the court case and the outcome I knew we deserved.

Soon after, I spoke to an old friend who had been in my cult, who now lived interstate with her husband and two children. She had been studying psychology in the last few years herself and had her head fully around the process of mind control. I chatted to her about the court case and the

different pieces of information we had gathered to use in our favour. She was extremely positive about us winning. ‘I just know it will all work out,’ she said, ‘and one day you will write your book and share your story.’

I kept her encouraging words close to my heart from that day forward.

Employment

IN MARCH 2012, out of financial desperation, I began to search for work. I joined a temping agency and was offered a job as an Administrator at a company in the building industry. It was only four days a week and I would be assisting the sales department. I was incredibly shy at first and terrified I would be a failure at the job. I was in my own office, making calls to builders, architects, and residential clients all day long. I was thorough in my notes and told the sales guys when it was time to take over and secure a sale over their competitors. After twelve months in the role everything was going well. Nothing could have prepared me for the day I walked into my manager's office, and he told me that I had been made redundant. I was speechless. I couldn't believe this was happening to me! As I gathered my things, he attempted to reassure me that it was because I was the last to be hired and therefore the first to go. 'It's purely for financial reasons,' he said, but I didn't believe him.

I was devastated and my self-esteem took a huge dive. I attempted to find another temping job and landed myself a role working for another Sales Manager in a wine distribution company. I used my last boss as a reference. I struggled again

with the belief that I was a valuable worker. I was especially nervous that the position was as a Marketing Coordinator. Although I had qualifications in marketing from university, my confidence at being able to utilise my creative skills had waned. I also faced a steep learning curve in regard to wine, as I had no idea if a Sauvignon Blanc or Shiraz was red or white!

Within a few weeks, I became relied upon favourably by my female manager. They had advertised the role looking for a permanent candidate. I interviewed for the position along with some others. On a Friday afternoon, the manager offered me the job, saying that although I didn't have as much experience in marketing as the other candidates, she felt, for the first time, that she could go out on the road and perform her sales function without having to worry about coming back to the office and checking in. I excitedly accepted the job.

That day, amongst other tasks, she sent me an email asking me to do something for one of her clients, which I did, cc'ing the client in on my response. Come Monday morning, my manager became angry and in a loud voice, in front of my two colleagues, demanded: 'Why did you cc. the client?'

I immediately froze and retreated into my shell. I was on the verge of tears when she told me dismissively: 'Don't do it again.'

As I tried to keep from crying, I slowly packed up my belongings, gathered my handbag and told my two colleagues (who were by now newfound friends) that I was leaving. They told me that the manager had a tendency to be volatile but assured me that everything would be ok and that they didn't want me to go. I knew (from past experience) that if she was

like this now, the behaviour would only continue, and I was too fragile to be on the receiving end of another woman's wrath. I later realised that the reason she had been so angry was that she had asked me to do something that she was supposed to have done, and I'd made her look bad in front of her client. I promised myself not to work for any more females.

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I texted my old manager from the building company and asked if he could be a referee for me once more as I'd now finished this job and was looking for a new one. Within a week, I received a phone call from one of the managers in the Service Department of that same building company, asking me if I would be interested in joining their department. I was overjoyed to think that maybe it wasn't because of my performance that I had been retrenched those few months before, and immediately accepted.

One night, a number of staff decided to go out together, heading somewhere near to where I lived. My children were at Michael's for the holidays, and I decided to get out of my comfort zone. I invited two of the girls to sleep at my house so that they wouldn't have to travel all the way home after a big night, and then we could go to work together the next morning. I cleaned and tidied my house and prepared some pancakes and fruit for breakfast the next day.

After our night out, we woke up and I set the table and brought out the food. While we were eating, three baby cockroaches appeared on the wall. I was mortified. I had been

so careful to clean the house and prepare a beautiful meal, and here were some disgusting creatures which I abhorred and reminded me of the dirtiness I felt whilst living in my old homes near Omaroo. I froze, and my mind went numb. I attempted to ignore the cockroaches, because I couldn't bring myself to remove them in front of the girls. We chatted a bit longer while I manoeuvred for us all to finish eating as quickly as possible.

My mind was still racing, and my body was in sensory overload as I drove us to work, and we entered the building. I tried to get on with my work, but I couldn't function. I got up from my desk, went out to the back of the building, and burst into tears. I was crying uncontrollably, and was paranoid someone would hear me, but I couldn't help it. I was horrified when one of the girls came out for a smoke and found me. She awkwardly asked if I was alright; I excused myself and ran away. I spent an hour pacing the nearby streets, trying to bring myself down from my psychosis: *I want to kill myself... I want to kill myself... I want to kill myself.*

I called the number that my counsellor had given me "just in case", for Lifeline. A woman answered. I told her about what had just happened with the cockroaches and the overwhelming feelings I couldn't contain. All I wanted was for her to reassure me that it was ok, that this was normal, that it was normal for cockroaches to be breeding in your home and come out when guests were enjoying their breakfast at your dining table! The woman attempted to calm me down, telling me, 'There are lots of cockroaches in Sydney, especially in apartment buildings.'

I tried to believe her and feel better, but I thought she was just placating me. I didn't think other people experienced this, only me. My thoughts moved instead to believing that Natasha had put a spell on me, so that cockroaches would swarm my home, as punishment for what I did to her. I had once heard that she had been raving one day on a run at Omaroo, with words to the effect of putting a spell on Jenny. Considering Jenny's house had burnt down, I believed it was a real possibility.

Eventually I decided to go home. I couldn't go back to work with my eyes red and bulging. I called my manager to let him know that I wasn't feeling well and that I had to go home. No doubt, the girl who had found me had told somebody, if not everybody about me. When I arrived home, I closed the door and climbed into bed.

I stayed there for three days. I didn't answer my phone or talk to anybody until my mum came over to see if I was ok. She cuddled me and tried to soothe me, and I asked her advice about cockroaches.

When I went back to work, I tried to act as normal as possible and didn't mention my sudden disappearance.

As time moved on, the job became very stressful as I was managing three service technicians down in Melbourne. They did not take well to me telling them what to do from Sydney. One day I caught out one of the guys lying, telling me he was still at a job, when in fact he had only been there for half an hour in the morning. I was so good at catching out lies, and I thought lying was the root of all evil. I took this information to my boss, who subsequently reprimanded the technician. However, the guy was obviously not happy with me and

turned the other two technicians against me. It became difficult to continue to work under that pressure and I ended up leaving abruptly one day when it was particularly tense. It was a good move, as it meant for better or for worse, I was making decisions for myself and again choosing not to stay in a place where I was unhappy.

I moved swiftly into another temp role which became permanent at an education and training company. I commenced as a Team Assistant, transitioned to Executive Assistant to the CEO, and arrived at Manager – Executive Office. I was thrilled that I had gained ground so quickly, to be recognised as a valuable team member in a national organisation. As I focused on my new role, I continued to steadily challenge myself and build my self-esteem.

Apology to Natasha Lakaev

IN 2013, WE received a devastating blow from Sam and Harriette. Initially, it had been a triumph. They had won their court case against Natasha, as the Judgement handed down was that Natasha had been “out of time”. We were all so excited and victory tasted sweet. However, before long, we heard news that they had signed an Apology to Natasha Lakaev. We were confused. *Why had they done such a thing?*

I called Harriette who admitted that they couldn’t keep going, especially not her. After the Judgement, Natasha had put in an Appeal, and Harriette said she couldn’t handle the stress and the pressure anymore. Sam who had been doing most of the legal work himself, had been working tirelessly on the case, and they had spent tens of thousands of dollars on barristers and court fees. They were on their last legs. Harriette said that they were going to sell their house, which had been their pride and joy, because they didn’t want Natasha knowing where they lived anymore. They were paranoid that their house would be burnt down too, or worse.

My dad was incredulous. He couldn’t understand why they would give in to Natasha like that. It had been extremely distressing for myself at each step in the legal process, every

six months or so, to provide further information to the solicitors, reliving over and over the trauma of the past. I could understand their decision.

In true form, Natasha posted the Apology on the internet. She created another website called “The Complete Retraction and Apology to Natasha Lakaev”. On it she posted all the apologies she had systematically collected from the various victims of her litigation cases. These included Media Mouse Limited (to whom Ben told me Natasha had paid \$45,000 for them to write her an apology, after they insisted they would simply delete the alleged defamatory information off the internet); Sam and Harriette’s apology; along with fake apologies from Google and Rick Ross (on whose website the negative blogs had been posted).

However, contrary information began sprouting up on the internet. Not only were more blogs posted on the Rick Ross website from others admonishing Natasha and her processes, but Elizabeth, who had lived with us for a while at 103 and gone out with Natasha’s son, Henry, for a time, put an extract of her experience in the cult on a forum. She gave many insights into her observations of Natasha, including how she treated us all as slaves; she wrote damaging accusations against her ex-boyfriend; and she described how she used to hear our children screaming and crying out for us in the middle of the night when we weren’t home. That last point wrenched at my heart. I was determined to never give up, no matter how hard things became – to seek justice for Natasha’s treatment of us.

One day I called the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) again and told them I wanted them to review my Fair Work application with all the evidence I had collected. I reiterated that this time I did not want them to inform Natasha or put my name to it. The woman on the phone told me that in that case, the only thing she could do was to put the document in Natasha's file and not act on it. She then said, in an aggressive tone, 'why are you so angry and intent on damaging this woman's reputation?'

I was appalled. I retorted, '*we're* the victims in this situation, not *her!*'

I couldn't comprehend what the Psychology Board was thinking. I visited a psychologist after this who had counselled other ex-members from my cult, and she said that there had been at least nine other Complaints submitted to the Board before mine. She informed me that the Case Worker who had been allocated to the investigation of Natasha in 2008/2009, upon interviewing Natasha, said that he had found her to be one of the most charming people he had ever met.

After the case against her had been dismissed, the Case Worker confided in the psychologist that he was frightened of the prospect that, contrary to his assessment, Natasha may actually be the person the nine Complaints had described.

Discovery of Evidence

WHEN IT WAS time for Discovery in the court case, we had to collate all the evidence we had and put it into a list. I had already been going through the piles of paperwork in my possession which proved our ordeal. I had no idea that I had succeeded in salvaging so much documentation from 103, considering we'd left half our home's contents behind. I had course receipts, course brochures, exercise books where I had taken profuse notes (which was my way) throughout the programs. It was incredible. I had kept my phone bills from the last two years in the cult, which had proof of phone calls from Natasha at certain periods which proved that she was in contact with me, contrary to her ravings on the internet that she had not been involved with Universal Knowledge and its staff since 1998.

I had documents Natasha had signed which were dated in recent years, again proving that she was involved in every aspect of the business she claimed she had nothing to do with. It was such a relief, and this gave me the zest and energy to keep going and push through any doubts, fears, and trauma that I still underwent. I wanted to prove the truth about this woman.

I ended up with over 370 items on my Discovery list. I photocopied the evidence at the office of my brother's father-in-law. He was a godsend, as it would have cost me a fortune to pay for the photocopying at a shop. I provided my own paper, and I knew he was surprised when I spent two full days straight standing at the photocopier with my folders strewn all over the desks making four copies of each item.

I was proud of my achievements after spending hours, days, and weeks, putting each piece of paper in a plastic sleeve and in folders in order sequence – a copy for the Barrister, the Solicitors, myself, and the other side. All those years practicing in Natasha's office with her accounts paperwork had served me well! When I took all my folders in a large suitcase into the solicitors' office to hand to Jack and Matt, I knew they were impressed with its organisation and clarity, or at least I was!

It was then time to hand one set over to Natasha's solicitor, whose office was in the Sydney CBD. Matt and I booked an appointment. With trepidation and Matt by my side, I entered the small, untidy office. I instantly felt better. I could see that our side was much more organised, and I knew we would be better prepared for the day the trial commenced.

As far as Natasha's documents were concerned, they came to us in fits and starts. She was late with most, if not all her submissions to court, and her evidence was no different. We were told we could view the evidence at her solicitor's office and then request which documents we wanted to have copied. Matt said that we would wait a while to begin looking at documents, until the case proceeded a little further. This made me anxious as I knew that the Fairfax solicitors wanted to settle the case before it went to court.

I read through Natasha's Discovery list and chose which documents I thought would be beneficial to have on file. I knew that a lot of her evidence would be rubbish. For instance, she had included all the student testimonials she made everyone fill out at the end of each course. I also chose the items which would give me answers to the missing gaps of information I did not have, since leaving Natasha's grasp.

I sent through my document request to Natasha's solicitor without telling Matt. I received a call sometime later saying that the folders were ready to be collected. Once I had them in my hands, I pored over them, hungry for evidence of Natasha's wrongdoing. Immediately, I found proof of what I had suspected had been going on since I left. There was a typed-up recording of the conversation Natasha had had with a prior employer in Gosford, near to where her parents lived, 1.5 hours north of Sydney. She had been sacked after one of her colleagues had looked her up on the internet and found all the information proving she was a cult leader. This had happened because she had boasted about her businesses at Byron Bay, and they had looked her up online.

I also found evidence that she had completed her Master of Psychology at Charles Sturt University in 2012. I was astounded and appalled at this, considering as far as I was aware, she had not been able to continue her postgraduate studies at either QUT or Bond University. She had gone so far as to sue Bond University for defamation. I couldn't believe my eyes when I read in the conversation extract that the Head of the Psychology department at CSU was connected to the Psychology Board. I deduced that it must be him who had protected her, enabling her to continue practicing and to undertake further postgraduate studies. I was livid with the

realisation that another man had been manipulated by Natasha and allowed her to achieve undeserved tertiary qualifications.

I also saw evidence of the many short training courses she had undertaken in her pursuit to gain “legitimate” accreditations in Psychology. It was starkly obvious that the only qualification she had held while she was directing Life Integration programmes and supposedly counselling students, was the bachelor’s degree in agriculture!

I also noted that, compared to the 1cm thick police statement I had prepared and the one-page report that it had been reduced to, it seemed Natasha (under the name of Dominic) had given the police a pile that was around three inches thick! No wonder they had been loath to investigate.

When Matt and I eventually attended the solicitor’s office together, I knew what I was looking for. I scanned the folders, wanting to see what I was missing within my own collection. Most of the paperwork was disorganised – it looked like the documents had been hurriedly photocopied and put together. There were also several portions missing from the list, which we had to request the solicitor to chase, and provide at a later date.

I admitted to Matt that I had had some documents copied already. I felt guilty that I had not been upfront with him sooner, but I was glad that I had been proactive, in case the newspapers had settled in the meantime. When he ordered two copies of her Discovery documents, one set for himself and another for Frank, our Barrister on the case, I told him that I would highlight all the important sections to make it easier for them both. I spent days going through every page, highlighting the points and quotes that could be used in the

trial to catch Natasha out, and prove that what was written in our articles was true and in the public interest.

As the 7th of October 2014, the trial date, approached, our Solicitors – Matt, representing News Limited, and Greta, representing Fairfax – wanted to meet all our witnesses. It had been difficult asking people if they would be willing to give evidence in court, against the woman who had physically attacked them (on multiple occasions) and left deep psychological scars. Some refused to support us as they had already gone through too much or were afraid of the repercussions. In the end, we had five women who were brave enough to put themselves forward to bare all in the witness box. Matt and Greta flew to various locations in Australia to interview them, seeking corroboration for Michael and my stories, which they found. We all broke down during this session. We then had to undergo a second round of questions with Frank, closer to the trial. His questions, in the role of Barrister, seemed harder hitting.

Countdown

LEADING UP TO the court case, I learnt that Fairfax had indeed tried to settle at least twice. Natasha had rejected their offers. I knew she wouldn't be interested in anything other than the maximum amount she could possibly gain.

We also learnt that Natasha was involved in yet another court case, in the United States. We discovered on the internet that she was suing the Rock School, a holiday dance school in Philadelphia, attached to Julliard in New York. We knew her son, Timothy, was attending Julliard on a scholarship. From a newspaper article and the legal writ published online, we read that she was suing the Rock School for loss of wages. From what we gathered, she had manoeuvred her way into the position of Student Accommodation Director of the holiday dance program by swinging her weight around and professing her expertise in organisation and management. She claimed that the Rock School had offered her the position, a Work Visa, and \$5000 in wages per week. Subsequently, after they uncovered the allegations of her being a cult leader in Australia, coupled with the fact she had used one of their vehicles without permission, they had thrown her off campus.

My parents and I, along with News Limited's Solicitors, Jack and Matt, took great pleasure in imagining Natasha and

her son being harassed off the dance school's premises. We realised that this meant she must be paying out even more money for legal fees. We also now knew, via the internet, that she had sold her two properties in Byron Bay, and that the bank had come in to take over her Burleigh Heads penthouse property which was under default. We felt like we were starting to gain an advantage.

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When the day finally came to make our way to Brisbane for the trial, three years after the first writ had been served, I was a nervous wreck. I felt sick to my stomach, but I was glad that the day had finally come, because I couldn't go through another year of anxiety. I wanted to put this chapter firmly behind me and move on with my life. My children would also be happy once this was all over. They had watched me go over and over our story each time I prepared documentation, and they knew how it affected me. Whenever I was in the midst of preparations, I would be angry and short-tempered. I didn't want to be like that around them. Each time I read or remembered something about Natasha, I would feel enraged, thinking of the time I had lost with my children and the wasted years that could have been spent building a career for myself, instead of living week-to-week, still struggling.

The night before the court hearing (which itself took place the day before the four-week trial commenced) I received a phone call from Matt, who said that Natasha was asking the Judge to delay the trial. A month or so earlier, both Matt and Greta had asked the Judge if they could delay the

trial as they didn't think that our side was ready; however, Natasha had refused. Now Natasha was requesting an extension herself. The Solicitors went into overdrive. They asked Michael and I to type up an Affidavit stating why we believed the trial should go ahead. Natasha was claiming that she didn't have enough money for a solicitor or a barrister and that she needed to raise more funds, which she would do in the ensuing months. If an extension was given, Matt and Greta said the court case would be delayed for at least another six to twelve months, as it was difficult to lock in trial dates.

I wanted to give everything I had in me, to ensure that the trial was not delayed, and to show Natasha up for her lies and manipulation. I wrote that she had a lot of experience in legal cases as she had sued multiple parties previously, thus she had the knowledge to defend herself, just as Michael and I were doing (the newspapers were not officially defending us in court); I said that she had been trying to sell her property, Omaroo, for years, so it was unlikely that a sale would occur in the near future to provide the funds she stated would eventuate in the short term; I stated categorically that she was a manipulator and that she was displaying this characteristic once again; I concluded that it would be unfair to delay the trial, when she had so adamantly refused to do so when our side had asked the same thing earlier in the year.

We all emailed our Affidavits to the Judge at around 7am on the morning of the final hearing, and anxiously prepared ourselves for the worst.

Trial

ON ARRIVAL AT the hearing, I was terrified of coming face-to-face with the perpetrator who had abused me on so many levels. When *The Gold Coast Bulletin* journalist, Anne, saw Natasha outside the courtroom, she commented on the amount of plastic surgery Natasha had had done on her face.

Throughout the whole hearing, I did not look at Natasha once. She was sitting two to three metres away from me, at the table to my left. I had asked Michael to sit between us so that I would not be in her direct line of vision. I didn't look at her whilst she gave evidence in the witness stand either. I can understand why most victims do not come forward or take their perpetrators to court: it is simply so overwhelming to see them again. Victims are expected to be in the same courtroom, in close proximity to their abusers, and to effectively recount the damage inflicted upon them by that person.

To hear more lies out of Natasha's mouth was distressing, to say the least. I was so angry that it was hard to contain my disdain while she was speaking. I looked up at the ceiling and rolled my eyes a multitude of times as I listened. She was pretending to be the victim herself. She put on a quiet, innocent voice – at times barely audible – and coughed

frequently. She stated that she couldn't go through with the court case at this time, because: 'I just end up with severe bladder and bowel problems. So, I need to go to the toilet a lot.'

She intimated that she didn't have enough experience with the court system to know how to defend herself in her own trial. She also stated that she would soon have money to pay for lawyers, from proceeds from the sale of her property, Omaroo, which she said was going to occur soon. If Omaroo did not sell, she reasoned, then her penthouse property at Burleigh Heads would soon be bought by a property development company. She assured the Judge that there was 'a deal already on the table.'

I couldn't believe my ears as she told lie after lie. I should have expected it, as her performance was reminiscent of her behaviour in all the years I had known her.

When it came time for me to get up on the witness stand, I was ready. I had been furiously writing down notes to contradict her statements, and when I stood on the stand, I asked not to swear on the Bible. I said, 'I no longer believe in God,' so the Judge asked me to make a civil promise to tell the truth. I had intended my statement to illustrate the fact that Natasha had contributed to my spiritual derision.

I commenced by stating that Natasha had been in numerous litigations throughout the time I had known her, and before. The Judge said that I could only make statements about court cases in which I had personally been involved. I listed off a number of cases I could remember, and the barrister Natasha had hired for that day fired questions at me in a highly aggressive tone. He asked me about the court

cases, wanting me to prove my statements again and again. He tried to refute everything I said. I attempted to shoot back facts and figures backing up my claims and said that I had proof in the physical evidence I had brought up for the trial. I had left a large suitcase full of my original evidence at the hotel where Matt and Greta were staying and said that I could find the documents and bring them back to court. I said that the property Natasha claimed would sell soon had been on the market since 2008 and had recently not sold at auction.

Luckily my father had been keeping evidence on Natasha himself over the years, and I had a printed, dated copy of an online advertisement of Omaroo on the market for \$3.3 million. Since my leaving the cult, we had both scoffed at the fact that Natasha was crazy enough to think she could sell the property for that much money. It came down to \$2.3m at one point, and then to \$1.5m. My dad was chuffed when he more recently checked an online value analysis of what every home in Australia was worth, and her property sat at \$450,000. It proved how delusional and greedy she was.

The Judge asked me to go to my hotel during the lunch break and bring back any evidence of court cases and the property sale advertisement. At the same time, our Solicitors looked up each Australian Court register. When we came back into the room, our Barrister, Frank, listed nine court cases Natasha had either instigated, or that had been brought against her. I presented evidence of Natasha's defamation case against my parents, and an old, wrinkled piece of paper which showed the property, Omaroo, had been for sale since April 2009. I apologised for getting my facts wrong, as I had stated that it was 2008, not 2009. I was pleased with myself,

however, as I handed the evidence over to the bailiff, who swiftly gave it to the Judge. The Judge asked if she could keep the document for the duration of the trial, promising I would get it back at the end. ‘Of course,’ I agreed happily.

It was a triumphant moment.

When Natasha returned to the stand for cross-examination, at one point she said it was difficult for her to remember things due to an accident in which she hit her head, resulting in brain damage. When it was time for me to ask questions, I stood up bravely, hands trembling and voice shaking, and asked her: ‘Ms Lakaev, can you please tell the court what incident caused your alleged brain injury that you stated is causing you – has caused you to forget your – long-term memory?’

‘Just before we go there,’ the Judge cut in, ‘we’re not really in the trial proper. We’re just dealing with the question of whether the trial should be adjourned or not. Does that matter to that question?’

‘Well,’ I replied, ‘it’s just that – to see if the evidence can be relied, on or if – Ms Lakaev is actually telling the truth about a brain injury. Because I know what did cause this incident that she has alleged.’

‘Look,’ the Judge said, ‘I think it might be probably only indirectly relevant at best and I’m keeping an eye on the time and I do want to finish this application at least today.’

I had wanted Natasha to explain in front of everyone that she had in fact been punched in the face by her own son, Justin, which had allegedly culminated in her falling over and hitting her head on a marble hallstand. I had seen her being whisked away in an ambulance. She told us all that she had

moved in Justin's way, as he attempted to punch her second son, Henry. I was certain she had been the real target. She had claimed income protection insurance for years after that incident and was obviously still using it to gain leverage.

Although I couldn't make the statement in court, I knew Natasha was rattled by my question, and it would have worried her to consider I might ask similar questions throughout our subsequent four-week trial.

Late in the afternoon, the Judge informed us that she had dismissed Natasha's application for an adjournment. She gave us her reasons why, along with a summation of the day's events.

The Judge made this statement in regard to Natasha not confirming representation for the trial: "I'll just add a parenthetical note about the plaintiff's attitude to this litigation in a way which is, to my mind, peculiar and irresponsible but seems to be a method she has adopted in litigation in the past if her evidence as to this is to be believed."

Regarding Natasha's statement that she would soon receive a large amount of money from the potential sale of her penthouse, the Judge said: "It was all very vague evidence which I don't regard as reliable. It's secondary evidence as to documents and I thought in this part of her evidence as with other parts of her evidence the plaintiff prevaricated, talked in circumlocutions, and otherwise tried to avoid anything that might otherwise – do otherwise than bolster a case. At one point, she told her own counsel that the amount of debt – she gave a figure to her own counsel of the amount of debt owing on the property as the debt less interest which, really, I don't

accept is anything but a deliberate attempt to obfuscate the issue.

“... So, it seems to me that at the moment the plaintiff cannot pay for representation at a trial and cannot secure representation on a pro bono or other speculative basis and there is just no evidence that that situation will change.”

In response to Natasha’s statements of ailments she said: “... The plaintiff raises other rather scattergun reasons as to her not being able to run the trial. She says she suffers from medical conditions but there is no evidence of that, and I am inclined not simply to take her word for it. As I say, I found her evidence deliberately prevaricating and at times demonstrably untrue during the course of this adjournment application.

“... It happens often enough in this court that even defendants in criminal matters run their own trials in front of juries, so it is by no means impossible. And, as I say, it is the result of a risk that the plaintiff was prepared to take.”

About Michael and me, the Judge said: “... I turn to the other side of the record. The fifth and sixth defendants appeared before me today. They both filed affidavits which go as to their personal circumstances. They say, and I accept, given the type of matters in issue in this litigation that they find this litigation very stressful. And, if I may say so, it was evident when the fifth defendant gave evidence today on the adjournment application that this is so. They have both had to take holidays or time off work for which they are not paid in order to meet their commitments to come to this court to run the matter themselves. These types of personal stressors and inconveniences are something that the court takes very

seriously, recognising that in litigation there is often more at stake than money.”

It was incredible to hear all these statements so eloquently articulated by the Judge. I was ecstatic that this intelligent, experienced woman of the Bar had seen straight through Natasha. She had specifically pointed out Natasha’s attempts to be vague and to lie, blatantly stating her evidence was “unreliable”. *Finally*, I thought. *Natasha isn’t going to get away with anything!*

My favourite statement was “I found her evidence deliberately prevaricating and at times demonstrably untrue”. I had to look up the meaning of *prevaricating* and knew this sentence would stick in my mind forever.

After the Judge had left the courtroom and Natasha, Ben, and her barrister had exited, too, my mum and I turned to our fellow Defendants with elated smiles of relief.

It was soon overshadowed with anxious trepidation toward what lay ahead. The prospect of coming back the following morning was felt with a heavy heart. It was now close to 5.30pm and it was going to be hard to muster the strength and courage to face another day, let alone four weeks of this torture.

But events would soon change. Close to half an hour after leaving the courtroom and congregating in a meeting room just outside, our Barrister, Frank, came in after having spoken with Natasha. ‘Ok,’ he said. ‘We’re going to try and settle.’

All of a sudden there was animated discussion between Matt, Greta, and Frank, about what it would take to settle. They had to decide on what terms they were not prepared to

budge, and on what they were willing to forego. They said it was up to Natasha to put the first offer on the table. We waited with bated breath to see what was on that list.

When the terms eventually came, Natasha requested that the Fairfax article be pulled down from the *Sydney Morning Herald* website, and she requested that we not speak of, or write, anything about her or her family again in the future.

I was confounded. *I did not spend the last three years fighting this case to be shut down and told to keep quiet about her actions!*

‘No,’ I told everyone. ‘I’m not going to agree to that.’

In response, Michael, Matt, Greta, and Frank tried to convince me that I should sign the piece of paper. They each told me that I wouldn’t want to go through the trauma of a four-week trial and that I would regret it tomorrow if I didn’t sign.

I couldn’t believe my ears, especially when Michael said the same thing. I thought, *what kind of outfit is this?*

I said to all the faces staring back at me: ‘What about her still being registered as a psychologist? We won’t be able to prevent her from practicing if we have to keep quiet.’

The solicitors also knew that I intended to write a book one day. I remembered my friend, Theodora, who had encouraged me to share my story, and said she knew we would most definitely win the court case.

‘How about,’ Frank tried to negotiate, ‘you can speak about your experiences but just not mention her name?’

With all my might, I stood my ground. *Thank goodness my mother was with me.*

I said to them: ‘Could you please just cross out that statement, that we won’t speak or write about her again?’

With a hint of annoyance, Frank crossed out the offending statement and handed it back to Natasha, Ben, and their solicitor in the next room.

News came back shortly afterward from Natasha’s solicitor, stating that Natasha would not accept those terms. I refused to budge. ‘If you all want to sign,’ I said, ‘I can run my court case on my own.’

‘No,’ Frank replied. ‘We all have to run as one.’

Matt said he would call Jack, the Partner who had originally dealt with us and had overseen the case for News Limited, for advice. Jack didn’t answer the phone; Matt left a message. Before long, Security asked us to leave the courthouse as it was now closed. Frank offered for us all to go back to his chambers nearby. Frank led the way, and we walked along behind Ben, Natasha, and her solicitor. By this time, it was around 7pm.

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We were all starving, so Michael bought some potato chips and drinks for everyone to share. I didn’t want to eat or drink anything until everything was resolved. I sat still, my mind focused on the outcome I believed we all deserved. Frank sat behind his large desk, working on a statement that he thought might prove mutually agreeable. We talked amongst ourselves as time ticked on. We had still not yet heard back from Jack.

Frank again attempted to convince me to settle with new proposed terms and then, out of nowhere, said:

‘You’re being vindictive. Why do you want to destroy her as a psychologist?’

I couldn’t believe what had just come out of his mouth. ‘She’s dealing with vulnerable people and she’s a *criminal!*’ I exclaimed.

‘She’s *not* a criminal,’ he said.

I took a deep breath as the blood rushed to my temples. ‘She *is* a criminal. She has physically assaulted people, psychologically abused people, and conned people out of money! I worked without pay for ten years!’

At that point, I could feel the air thicken with tension. I thought, *this guy has no idea what he is talking about! Has he even read the evidence I gave him? Has he actually prepared for this court case?*

I knew, in that moment, that I could not trust Frank whatsoever. I registered that there was no way I was going to be able to work with this guy if the trial went ahead. It seemed to me that he just wanted to go home to his family and get this all over with, and I wondered if Natasha had managed to manipulate him while he was in the other room with her. I was even more determined to stick to my guns.

Luckily, at that point, Matt came in, alleviating the pressure that had built in the room:

‘Jack is on the phone and wants to speak to you.’

I squeezed into a tiny cupboard in the hallway and closed the door. I started crying. I said to Jack, ‘Frank is calling me vindictive and saying that Natasha is not a criminal!’

‘Carli,’ he said. ‘There is no way that you have to sign anything that states that you will not tell the truth about her or not be able to tell your story in the future. I’ve been speaking to the Editor of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* and we both agree that we don’t want Natasha Lakaev to get away with anything. She has done it for too long!’

‘Thank you, Jack!’ I whimpered.

‘If you want to go through with the four-week trial, we will back you up. You have our full support. I’ve just got off the phone to the Chief Counsel at Fairfax who has agreed, and said they want to do the same thing. I just have to wait to receive instructions from the National Editor of News.’

I felt so relieved. I was so grateful that Jack was behind me and that these two newspaper giants were backing up us small individuals seeking justice.

It took another hour and a half for Jack to get back to us. He gave Matt terms which didn’t give Natasha room to move at all.

Frank came back from being with Natasha, and said, ‘she wants Fairfax to pull down the articles and she won’t budge on that.’

There was some further discussion, as Greta said Fairfax didn’t want to pull the articles down.

Just after 10 o’clock, Natasha’s barrister walked out on her.

At 10.30pm, Frank came back from the next room and said: ‘Natasha looks completely spent and she’s at breaking point. She just wants this to be finished and to be able to get on with her life. Her main deal breaker is for the two *SMH* articles to be pulled down.’

Initially, Natasha had also requested that the two media companies write and sign a letter each stating the date they took down the newspaper articles, but Jack said no to this, as the *Gold Coast Bulletin's* articles had already been down since approximately 2013. Greta then agreed that they wouldn't provide that letter either. We all knew that Natasha would send these letters to Google, post them online, and give them to her future employers to prove she was innocent.

By phone, Jack then stretched our terms even further. Frank wrote the following settlement terms on a scrappy piece of paper:

1. Fairfax will remove the two articles from all Fairfax websites.
2. The plaintiff consents to an order that there be judgment for the defendants.
3. The parties each agree to bear their own costs.
5. The plaintiff hereby releases the defendants from all existing claim [stet] she may have against them.
6. The plaintiff will endeavour to withdraw her claim for Special Damages.

By the time the last terms regarding the letters were crossed out, Natasha simply signed the piece of paper. Her last stipulation was that the Fairfax articles were to be removed “permanently”.

It was 11pm by that point, almost six hours since we commenced the negotiations. We had whittled her down. We had come out the other side with the Judgment in our favour.

We had effectively won the whole court case and would be able to tell the truth about her in the future.

The Solicitors seemed really happy. I gathered from their conversations that a win didn't happen very often. I suspected the newspapers normally settled before a case eventuated in court. Greta said that Fairfax would be writing an article on the hearing we'd just had and the Judgement. She said, 'we may have to pull down the previous articles, but there is no stipulation on any future ones!'

We were all elated with our accomplishment.

'Where to from here?' I asked.

'We have to be back in court at 10am tomorrow,' said Greta, 'to hand over the signed settlement and inform the Judge that the case has been completed.'

As we left the room, I pointed to the box of Natasha's Discovery evidence I had highlighted for Frank and asked: 'Can I please keep the copies of the evidence I gave you?'

'I'll courier it to you,' he said.

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Mum and I had to drive Michael back to the Gold Coast, as the last train had already left Brisbane. As we drove down the highway, we recalled all the events of the day. We couldn't stop smiling. Michael said he would bring Sebastian up with him the next morning, as Sebastian had wanted to attend the trial on its first day anyway. Our children had been staying with Michael for the week leading up to the trial so that I could prepare properly. I thought it would be wonderful for

Sebastian to come and feel empowered, after the loss he had suffered at Natasha's hands as a child.

Whilst driving, I received an unexpected phone call from Michael Bachelard, who had called to congratulate us on our triumph. He was calling from Indonesia where he now worked as a Foreign Correspondent. I had to pull over for Mum to continue driving, as I relayed the entire days' events with great animation. Michael apologised for not being with us and said he had planned to fly in for the trial if it went ahead. He told us that he was going to write another article the next morning, covering the winding-up of the case.

'Are you sure you really want to do that after all the trouble you have been through?' I exclaimed.

He said he certainly did, but that he would not be naming *me* this time, considering all the flack I had received after his last effort!

When I arrived home, I wrote an email to my dad, who had been too unwell to travel up with us. I gave him an overview of the day too, thanking him for his unwavering support and his dedication to the case and to me. I told him I would always appreciate how he had supported me, and how some of the evidence he had collected over the years, while I was away, had contributed to us winning the case!

It was with a feeling of pure contentment that I tucked myself into bed that night.

Victory

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, we attended court at 10am. When Frank told the Judge that we had settled the night before, I could see the relief on her face, and hear the relief in her voice, when she said, ‘thank you.’

No one, I thought, not even the Judge, wants to go through the agony of the previous day for the next four weeks!

I noticed the subtle exchange between Frank and Natasha as he handed over the formal Judgement letter for her to sign. My suspicion from the night before – that he had been manipulated by Natasha throughout the settlement negotiation to feel sorry for her and believe she was the victim, not us – was confirmed in my mind. When the Judge asked Natasha whether she agreed with the Judgement, I was scared Natasha would say no and change her mind. However, unlike the day before, when she had been soft-spoken, meek, and mild, she now boomed ‘yes’ to the Judge, before immediately gathering up her things, before the hearing had even concluded.

She waited at the door with Ben by her side while the Judge completed proceedings. I decided to look directly at her for the first time, considering it had been us who had triumphed. Instead of my expectations of her as a deflated

loser, I saw that she was back to her arrogant self: posture erect, dressed in her trademark tight pants and wedge high heels. She was standing as if it had been her who had won the case, not us. I looked at her contorted face and now short, dyed blonde hair, and realised her farcical performance the day before had been just that: a performance. She indeed was a great actor. I couldn't shake the feeling that things weren't quite over between us.

Michael and I were interviewed straight after leaving the courtroom by a journalist from APN, who had been sitting in throughout the previous day's hearing and that morning. He began asking us questions about how we felt winning the case. I began to blurt out the whole history again, as I had done with Michael Bachelard back in 2010. Quickly, I realised that I was talking to a "journalist", who would then write a story, which would be printed in a newspaper, which could then land us again in hot water. I swiftly changed tact and stuck to the facts of the past two days. He wanted to take a photo of us, but I didn't want to have a photo with Michael as we were no longer together. I also didn't want my photo in print again, so the journalist took a picture of Michael and Sebastian.

It was rewarding to read the articles when they were published. The journalist had gleaned information from the previous articles and gave his impressions from the two days in court. The articles were widely distributed across the APN network throughout Brisbane and regional Queensland, as well as northern NSW where the cult had been located.

~

Judgement day in court was a day of celebration. I spent hours on the phone to ex-members of our cult, relaying quotes from the day before, describing what Natasha looked like, what she had said, and how she had sounded so fake. I was pleased to learn from one of the Solicitors that Natasha had lifted her hands to cover her eyes in disbelief when the Judge had ruled she had to represent herself in the trial. I felt immense satisfaction that we had succeeded.

I invited all the ex-cult members who lived in Brisbane and surrounding areas to dinner the next evening. I wanted everyone to feel as triumphant as I did. Most of all, I wanted everyone to feel they could move forward a little further in their lives, with less fear and greater healing. It was so nice to gather and share stories, new and old, and feel that a chapter of our lives had closed. Although I wanted to believe that this *was* the end, I knew it wasn't fully over if I was going to write and publish my book.

As expected, Natasha posted on her websites that she had won the court case, citing the removal of the Fairfax articles as proof.

ORDER

Before: Dalton J
Date: 8 October 2014
Initiating Document: Claim and statement of claim filed 14 October 2011

BY CONSENT:

1. Judgment for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Defendants against the Plaintiff.

Signed:


Deputy Registrar

Judgment in the Defendants' Favour.

Aftermath

A FEW WEEKS after I'd arrived back in Sydney, I emailed Frank to ask if he could send down the folders with Natasha's evidence, which I had requested of him the night we left his chambers. I wanted to ensure that I had the evidence at hand, should I ever need to use it again in the future. He emailed me back saying that he had "thrown the folders out", but that he would send the *TNES* book and the other paperwork I had originally given him at the commencement of the case. I was in the car at the time and had read his email on my phone. I began yelling and screaming, bashing my fists against the steering wheel. I fell into another psychosis – I was so furious I couldn't breathe. *All the hours, days, and nights I spent going through the evidence, highlighting, and sticking post-It notes in each section so that he could use it in court. I was helping him to win the case!*

I couldn't see my parents, who were expecting me that night for dinner. The words *'I'm going to kill myself; I'm going to kill myself'* ran through my head. I imagined cars crashing into me and running me off the road. Why had he thrown the documents out when I had specifically asked for the folders to be sent to me and I was willing to pay for the courier?

~

When I got back to work, it was hard not to tell anyone about our success. I felt so proud that we had fought against someone I considered a psychopath and won. I had told my managers that I was attending a court case as a witness for a newspaper story I had been involved in. I didn't tell them that I was one of the Defendants.

~

One day, I found something new written by Natasha on the internet. I immediately felt the uneasy, sick sensation I was used to, and dreaded reading whatever else she might have posted online. When I clicked on the link "Apology from Psychology Board of QLD" I found the following:

RECENT NEWS - September 2015

Natasha Lakaev is a registered Clinical Psychologist with a strong reputation in the Psychology field.

While attending the Australian Psychological Society's 50th Anniversary Conference in September 2015 Natasha was approached in front of witnesses by a Psychologist in that had previously acted as the Chair of the Psychology Board of QLD (name is to remain confidential until certain processes have

occurred). This person wanted to provide a formal apology in person to Natasha for the following things:

- This person was the Chair of the Psychology Board of QLD (herein referred to as ‘the Board’) when the FALSE complaints were submitted about Natasha Lakaev from 2008 to 2010 in an attempt to discredit her and have her deregistered as a Psychologist.
- That the man that handled the Natasha’s complaint process within the Psychology Board of QLD was well known for being incompetent, for losing paperwork intentionally and for only dealing with matters that were of interest to him.
- That it was well known that the complaints against Natasha were completely false and that the two year investigation that had been undertaken by the investigator had been completely inappropriate and unnecessary.
- Meeting/s had been held within the Board ‘behind closed doors’ to discuss the damage that had been caused to Natasha Lakaev’s life

by the inappropriate complaint investigation and the lack of acknowledgement to Natasha and associated organisations that the complaints were entirely false.

- In these meetings the staff of the Psychology Board of QLD were reprimanded for the way that the investigation had been handled and the way Natasha Lakaev was treated.
- However, the staff were told that they were not allowed to make this acknowledgement of error and damage to Natasha Lakaev either formally or informally.
- The Chair of the Board adamantly requested that a formal apology be provided to Natasha Lakaev as a result of what occurred, but she was silenced on the matter and prevented from doing so.
- The Psychology Board of QLD was closed down after this investigation and absorbed into AHPRA, and the Board used this transition as a way to act as if necessary documents and information had been lost, so

that they weren't available to a Freedom of Information request from Natasha Lakaev. However the Chair of the Board stated to Natasha Lakaev that these documents still exist and could still be obtained.

- That legal action should have been taken by the Board against the people that made the false complaints about Natasha, as the Board's legislation allowed for this process to occur. However, during the closing of the Board and incorporation into AHPRA, new legislation was established that did not allow for legal action to be taken on complainants, even if their information was found to be intentionally false.
- Since these events the Chair of the Psychology Board of QLD had not been able to handle living with the guilt over what occurred to Natasha and how they were not allowed to make amends in any formal manner.
- The Chair of the Board felt that she could only now make this apology to Natasha in person

as she no longer worked for the Psychology Board of QLD or AHPRA.

Yet again, Natasha had doxxed herself in via her own website. She had informed us of exactly what had taken place. She had successfully manipulated the Chairwoman of the Queensland Psychology Board to believe that she was innocent, despite the nine or so Complaints that had been received to the contrary. She had prevented further investigation, manoeuvred her way out of being deregistered as a psychologist, and it appeared that evidence against her had been lost or destroyed in the process.

I wanted to call up the Psychology Board, or what was left of it, and blast them all. *How did people get away with this?* I exclaimed in my head.

Well, I realised, she had just demonstrated how.

Mind Control and Society

AFTER TWO YEARS and a large amount of restructuring within my company, the CEO I was assisting became redundant to make way for a Group CEO and his EA, which, in turn, made my own position redundant. I was offered a role as a Program and Event Manager, but I decided to leave. I took the redundancy as a sign to commence writing again.

The Executive team and I had a farewell dinner, and the CEO and I were asked what our next step would be. I mentioned quietly that my plan was to write a book. They prodded me to find out what I was going to write about, and I was hesitant to say anything. I took a deep breath and told them in a few words what I had been through. The CEO told me that he had known for a while that I had been in a cult, as someone at work had seen the information on the internet (my worst nightmare). He said he had told them that he didn't care. I appreciated him defending me. Everyone commended me on my strength and resolve and encouraged me to publish my book.

Before leaving my job, I came across a conference called Building Social Cohesion and Tackling Extremism. Now that I was not working, I was able to attend. The presenters ranged from the Victorian State Government, the Victorian Police

Force, a Women's Refugee Coalition, social workers, and members from the Islamic community. I was pleased to learn that the Victorian State Government had put a lot of time and effort into trying to figure out the process of Radicalisation, and they had worked extensively with academics to produce theories and de-radicalisation programs. I was hoping that the conference would be broad and discuss mind control across the whole community. However, it focused primarily on the radicalisation of Muslims.

It made me ponder the fact that there is a large portion of information and research missing on the extent of extreme groups that sprout from *all* religions, not just Islam. During the conference, many of the views expressed centred on the overriding belief that building resilience and ensuring social cohesion, education, employment, and greater equity, would prevent radicalisation. There was definitely an underlying apprehension to implicate the religion of Islam itself as a contributing factor. After my experience, it is my opinion that religion plays a very significant role in creating an environment which enables leaders, priests, or elders to use their power over the community, via religious doctrine, to manipulate and abuse individuals and families.

I believe society needs to instigate change at the very foundations of religions across the world, to prevent not only terrorism and economic and political oppression but increasing family breakdown.

Many cults use religion – the belief in God, the fear of God's wrath, and the promise of a better life in this lifetime or the next – to coerce and pressure followers to become *fully subservient*.

It is difficult to express views publicly on supposed Churches or cultic organisations in which people are brainwashed, as society generally makes the statement: “They can make their own decisions”.

Well, I, for one, know this is not true.

People do not *join* cults. They are coercively persuaded to become involved with a seemingly legitimate group, and once mind-controlled, they do not have the choice to leave.

People often ask, “what is the difference between a genuine religion and a cult?” The difference lies in whether a person, group, or body, enables freedom of choice. If a group demands of its members: money and/or property, free labour, excessive voluntary working hours, isolation from family and friends, and/or submits them to any other form of psychological, physical, or sexual harm, then it is, by definition, a cult. If a person cannot make reasonable decisions without first consulting a religious figure or group leader, then they have lost the capacity to lead their own lives in a direction which puts themselves and their family first.

The Australian media has highlighted the fact that political parties in this country have accepted donations from known cults, and that the Government has been contributing larger amounts of funding to cult-affiliated schools than to some state schools. I believe that there should be no religion taught at school. In my opinion, each child should be given an equal education with no outside, undue influences of authority or doctrine. If parents wish to teach their children ethics, morals, and religion at home, then that is their spiritual right.

It is our human right, to be free, and to decide our own fate.

I personally see religion as causing separation, a feeling of superiority, and instilling an “us versus them” mentality. This can ultimately lead to conflict, and as we have seen in many countries throughout history and today, full-blown war.

In my opinion, religious leaders and believers need to become less judgemental and more open to the views of secularists. By arguing for “religious freedom”, they are in fact taking away individuals’ freedom on some level, with their limiting and often discriminatory doctrine.

For example, due to religion, many governments prevent two people of the same sex from marrying before the law and their families; in some cultures, due to religious beliefs, a male is permitted to physically or sexually assault his partner; due to a lack of action by governments and the courts, there is generally inadequate legislation for vulnerable people who have been enslaved by coercive persuasion, to prove psychological abuse once they are no longer mind controlled.

Bullying and the abuse of power is prevalent in the workplace, and we can all see it and call it as it is. There are laws and procedures in place if there is a civil or criminal breach.

However, religious and cult leaders seem to be allowed to remain *above the law*.

In February 2017, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released a report revealing: “4,445 claimants alleged incidents of child sexual abuse in 4,765 reported claims to Catholic Church authorities between 1 January 1980 and 28 February 2015. A total of 1,880 alleged perpetrators (diocesan and religious priests, religious brothers, religious sisters, lay employees, or

volunteers) were identified in claims of child sexual abuse. The St John of God Brothers had the highest overall proportion of members who were alleged perpetrators (40.4%). 7 per cent of priests who ministered in Australia between 1950 and 2010 were alleged perpetrators”.

These statistics are merely a guide, as they include only the survey results divulged by the Catholic Church.

The Senior Counsel noted to the Commission that “the Church was unwilling to investigate the reported abuse and also assisted in covering up the incidents after they were reported. Children were ignored or worse, punished. Allegations were not investigated. Priests and religious (figures) were moved. The parishes or communities to which they were moved knew nothing of their past. Documents were not kept, or they were destroyed”.

The report also stated that “the average time between the first alleged incident date and the date the claim was received was 33 years”. Therefore, we are yet to discover how many more children were abused within the last thirty to forty years.

When do our mainstream Churches become accountable?

As of August 2011, according to Broken Rites, a support and advocacy group for church-related sex abuse victims, in Australia there have only been “50 Catholic Priests and Brothers, plus 13 lay personnel (mostly teachers) who have been through the Australian courts in recent years for sexual offences. The list is not complete as some offenders slip through the courts unnoticed”. From their website, it appears that forty-one have been jailed, and others received non-custodial sentences or there were inconclusive proceedings.

Only one cult leader in Australia has been convicted of their crimes. William Kamm, also known as “The Little Pebble”, was imprisoned in 2005 for a string of sexual attacks on a teenage girl, and later another under-age teenager. He served nine years for both offences. There are hundreds, if not thousands of cult leaders who remain free to enact psychological, physical, or sexual harm, and commit massive financial manipulation.

Many Churches and cults also receive tax-free exemption status when they are clearly not legitimate religions or charities. It has been recommended in cult support circles that governments create a body similar to France’s Miviludes, (Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances), which is funded to properly investigate suspicious organisations and fringe sects fully.

People will invariably search for more meaning in their lives. I was definitely one of them. However, now I believe we need to find spirituality within ourselves and in nature, and we should not seek approval or answers from only one source.

After attending the Building Social Cohesion and Tackling Extremism conference, I have realised local councils play a vital role. We can gain a sense of belonging from our families, as well as our community, via our children’s schools, sporting clubs, hobbies, music, the arts, or social get-togethers like morning teas or neighbourly barbecues.

It should also be noted that it is important to bring people who have experienced extremism into the forefront of radicalisation prevention. Anyone who has experienced mind control can help to educate and inform those who may be vulnerable to radicalisation or who have already been radicalised. They are an asset. They should not be shunned or remain in hiding.

Affirmative Action Today

AT ONE OF our bi-monthly CIFS meetings, we were fortunate to have a representative from SafeWork come to speak. This Australian Federal Government body deals with the Work, Health and Safety (WHS) requirements of organisations. The WHS Supervisor gave a detailed presentation on the legislative changes that were made in 2011 across Australia, changes which are still relatively unknown. The previously named Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Act was changed to the WHS Act and now covers physical as well as psychological injuries, which can be short term, long term, or experienced as after-effects.

The definition of a “Workplace” has become broader, and “Workers” are now defined as Paid, Unpaid or Members who simply attend a Workplace, which can include churches, community groups and in our terms, cults. For the first time, volunteers have rights, and the person who is the owner/manager/leader of an organisation has legal obligations of Duty of Care and Due Diligence to anyone who steps onto their property. If they don’t adhere to these laws already, they will have Improvement Notices sent to them by SafeWork. If they do not meet the Orders and rectify conditions henceforth, they will face legal action, fines, and ultimately, prison.

We were informed that a victim, friend, or family member can write a Complaint anonymously, and it will be investigated. Even a stranger who merely notices something that is *not quite right* can submit a Complaint report and it will be actioned. SafeWork also has the ability to enter a Workplace without permission and seize documents and equipment. For the first time in years, we came out of a meeting feeling like the tide had changed. There are now legal processes in place to enable the community to seek and attain justice in regard to cults.

Life Lessons

IT HAS BEEN a long journey to this point where I finally feel normal and good about myself... *most* of the time. I still give away clothes when they begin to hold negative memories, and I continue to wash my hands more than most, I'm sure. Triggers still come up out of nowhere on a daily basis, like when I'm washing dishes, folding towels, or driving. It is incredible, but annoying, how the mind works.

What have I learned from my experience? Having emerged from this ordeal, I am acutely aware of people who try to manipulate or lie to me, or who are subtly or overtly bullying me. I have no interest in anything New Age or religious, although I am still a deeply spiritual person. I have also learned that if anything sounds too good to be true, it usually is!

Unfortunately for our children, Michael and I broke up. There are some things that cannot be resolved after such an experience, and divorce can be one of the aftereffects. Coupled with the fact Michael and I met whilst in the cult, it is hard to know what was real about our relationship, or what was simply the result of Natasha and her manipulation. Michael is now in a happy relationship, and his partner and their daughter are adored by our three boys.

My biggest regret from the past is having tainted memories of what should have been blissful experiences – pregnancy and childbirth – and missing out on cherished moments with my children during their formative years. I still get upset when I see a newborn baby or watch young children running around with their doting parents in tow. I am also especially sad that I missed my grandmother’s funeral.

In addition, it has been extremely difficult coming to terms with some of my actions in the cult: hurting Michael during our relationship; helping to withhold Jenny’s children from her before she escaped; separating from my family and instigating AVOs against them; and inadvertently subjecting my children to Natasha and our cult experience.

As I have analysed and gone over the events of the past, it has helped me to realise that the psychological and physical pressures we were under unquestionably contributed to our actions. Our emotions were kept at such a heightened level, and our logical thought processes were completely suppressed. Early on in my recovery, I took the approach to wipe the slate clean and think that *everything* we said, thought or did in the cult was not who we really were, nor what would have happened if we were in our right frame of mind. Each of us has had to forgive ourselves on many levels. All in all, it was a horrific experience, and I would definitely describe it as “hell”.

I cannot say that I regret it completely, as it has led me to be the person I am today. Seven years down the track, I have finally reached a point in my life where I am not afraid to tell people my story, although I choose carefully who I tell. The majority of responses are of amazement and

encouragement, contrary to what I experienced with my school friends when I first escaped. I am sure it is because I have come a long way in my recovery. I understand the process of indoctrination and what actually happened to me, and I am no longer ashamed of my naivety or gullibility. I know that it was not my fault, and that it could happen to anyone in a stage of vulnerability in their life.

What have I gained from the experience? I have three beautiful children, for whom I am eternally grateful. I appreciate my parents like never before. To be separated from your family, to be told falsehoods about them and convinced that they shouldn't mean anything to you – and then to realise, on the other side, that they mean everything – is the greatest gift. I no longer wish to analyse childhood issues or resentments. None of that matters. It is the here and now that counts.

I hold an appreciation of freedom that not everybody does. I feel a strong empathy for those in unstable or war-torn countries, who live under the oppression of their government, military, or forced religion.

I am still idealistic and dream of world peace. I believe that each of us needs to make the choice to be compassionate and just people, and more importantly, we need to instil good values in our children. Just because we may have the power to take advantage of someone or a situation, doesn't mean that we should. We need to rid the world of greed, dishonesty, and violence, and we need to care for other people no matter their circumstances, regardless of race, creed, gender, or sexuality.

My greatest wish is that all cults be crushed, and that everyone locked away inside them may too, wake up and *set themselves free*.

EPILOGUE

Natasha Lakaev remains a registered Clinical Psychologist in the state of Queensland and New South Wales, Australia, despite numerous Notifications/Complaints by ex-students of Universal Knowledge and concerned Psychologists, to the former Psychologists Board of Queensland, and the current Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). She is currently completing a PhD in Psychology, on scholarship, at Monash University, Melbourne and owns a guesthouse in Tasmania and is residing there.

Omaroo sold in November 2016 for \$882,000, with proceeds going to a bank, as the property's loan was by that time in default.

Kate and Isabelle left the cult within eighteen months to two years after I did; Sarah left some time later. They are now undergoing their own forms of recovery. Kate's son, Josh, graduated university and is successfully running his own business.

Ben has also left Natasha's sphere and there appears to be few who remain in contact with her.

My children are happy, embracing every opportunity, and forging their own path. I have continued to work as an Executive Assistant, and my goal is to keep writing and speaking out about mind control. It is my hope that more psychologists and counsellors become educated in cult dynamics, and that all levels of the governments and the legal system become more aware of all forms of extremism, so that increased support can be provided to recovering ex-cult members and their families.

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Or visit the following:

Cult Education and Recovery:

www.carlimcconkey.com

Facebook - @CarliMcConkey

Instagram – carlimcconkey

GLOSSARY

Accessing	The process of extreme, emotional release via yelling and screaming on a black mat or pillow to remove one's unwanted cellular memory.
Beings	Spirits from other dimensions or realms.
Cellular Memory	Memories locked up in one's cells from this lifetime, their biological bloodline, and their past lifetimes.
Changes	Armageddon, the period from 11:11:11 or 12:12:12, in which the earth was prophesised to experience immense upheaval.
Chosen Ones	Group of a few humans who will survive the Armageddon-style changes on earth.
Cleanse	Accessing one's cellular memory to be rid of past negative memories and patterning.
Integration	Level of cleansing one has completed to achieve spiritual enlightenment.
In The Shit	When someone was targeted by Natasha Lakaev and psychologically and physically abused the most in the group at that point in time.
Issues	Problems or complaints about another person in the group or others in a person's past or present.

LIP	Life Integration Programmes – Natasha Lakaev’s registered company from 1991 to 2000 (later named Survivor Principles and then Universal Knowledge).
Mess	Referred to by Natasha Lakaev as the lack of completion of her personal and business accounts by various women in her office over time.
New Age	The period of the fourth dimension when there will be peace on earth for a thousand years.
Past Lives	A person’s past reincarnations before this lifetime.
Patterns	Habits of a person which prevent them from shifting and moving forward to reach their full potential.
PMC	Personal Mastery & Metaphysical Counselling – 12-month LIP course which continues indefinitely as Combined PMC.
Psychic Fleas	Beings from other dimensions that are made up of heavy and dark energy.
Regime	Prescribed daily ritual of Exercise, Diet, Juicing and Meditation.
Shift	The period of Survival when the earth’s axis will tilt, and human beings will be fighting one another for food and shelter in an Armageddon type scenario.

Stuck	Not shifting ones Patterns and moving forward in Integration.
Support Team	Volunteers who support students on LIP programs.
Survival	Another term for the Shift, when the world will transition from this dimension to the fourth dimension and humans will compete for food and shelter.
System	A person's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual body and mind.
TNES	The Next Evolutionary Step – the first LIP course.
Vibration	A person's energetic level of enlightenment allowing one to move to the next dimension, or not.

RECOMMENDED READING

Cults And Kids – A Study of Coercion.

Robert W. Dellinger.

Cults in Our Midst.

Margaret Thaler Singer. 2003.

Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships.

Janja Lalich and Madeleine Tobias. 2006.

Recovery From Cults.

Michael D. Langone. 1995.

SUPPORT

Australia

Cult Information and Family Support: CIFS.org.au

SafeWork Australia: SafeWorkAustralia.gov.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14. lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800. kidshelp.com.au

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36.

beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Headspace: 1800 650 890. headspace.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467.

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

USA

International Cultic Studies Association:

ICSAhome.com

Cult Education Institute: CultEducation.com

Adolescent Suicide Hotline 1-800-621-4000

Crisis Help Line: 1-800-233-4357

Suicide & Crisis Hotline: 1-800-999-9999

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK

National Child Abuse Hotline: 800-422-4453

UK

The Samaritans: 0845 790 9090

Child Line: 0800 1111

Counselling (Youth) – Maidenhead: 01628 636 6611

Youth Info Services – Milton Keynes: 0173 334 9932

Canada

Info-Cult: infosecte.org.au

Kids Help Phone: 1800 668 6868

Suicide Prevention Montreal: 1-866-APPELLE

Youthspace.ca: Online Chat or Text: 778-783-0177

France

European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects: FECRIS.org

Fil Sante Jeunes: 0800 235 236

Suicide Ecoute: 01 45 39 40 00

SOS Suicide Phenix: 01 40 44 46 45

La Criox Rouge Ecoute: 0 800 858 858

APPENDIX

The Eight Characteristics of Cults

By Robert J. Lifton

Milieu Control: The purposeful limitation of all forms of communication with the outside world. A closed system with rigid boundaries. Communication with the inner self is also controlled, i.e. what is acceptable to think and feel. Control over diet, sleep cycles.

Mystical Manipulation: Teaching that the group has been specially chosen to carry out a divine purpose and the recruit has been selected to play a special role in fulfilling that purpose. Uncritical faith and trust is expected.

The Sacred Science: The mission of the group is considered sacred...not to be questioned. The group purports to have a body of airtight evidence to support its claims.

The Demand for Purity: Since the Word, Idea, Mission of the group is sacred and pure, anything contaminating it must be eradicated. Anything done in the name of purity is considered moral and just, no matter how deceptive.

Confession: An expectation of baring one's innermost thoughts and feelings in order to purge oneself of doubts and impurities. Since the leader and Mission are perfect, anything that goes wrong is the fault of the member. Confession rituals pervade the group's atmosphere.

Loading the Language: Thought-stopping clichés and jargon that compress the most complex of human problems into brief, highly reductive, definitive sounding phrases, which are easily memorised and easily expressed.

Doctrine over Person: Convincing the subject that the group and its doctrine take precedence over any individual in the group or any other teaching from outside it. Individual boundaries are obliterated.

Dispensing of Existence: Teaching that all those who disagree with the philosophy of the group are doomed. Use of splitting, we/they, taken to extremes.

Modified from Andres, R & Lane, J. (1989) *Cults and Consequences*. Los Angeles: Commission on Cults and Missionaries.

The following two articles were published in the Melbourne Sunday Age and in the Sydney Morning Herald online on 17 October 2010:

In thrall to a cult: how the unwary fall victim to mind control

Michael Bachelard

October 17, 2010

The Sunday Age



Carli McConkey with son Hamish in front of the Old Melbourne Gaol. In the background are sons Jacob and Sebastian and husband Michael. *Photo: Simon O'Dwyer*

Carli McConkey lost 13 years of her life, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, to a New Age cult. Michael Bachelard investigates.

AS SHE left university to make her way in the world, Carli McConkey suffered all the workaday self-doubts. She believed she was overweight, was unsure of her chosen career and was worried about finding Mr Right. She was disillusioned with Catholicism and craved spiritual fulfilment. She was also bright, popular, academically successful. After she organised the 1995 orientation week at her university, a careers adviser wrote: "Carli is my idea of an outstanding Australian".

Thirteen years later, McConkey is broke and exhausted. She has been beaten up and has mistreated others. She has spent years estranged from her parents, neglected her children, misled the courts and has worked as a virtual slave. Fixed in her mind is the fear that in December 2012 the world will come to an end and all but a few of us will die. At 35, she is also sterile, having been persuaded to undergo a tubal ligation in the belief that she was an unfit mother to her three sons.

Carli McConkey is not mentally ill. Neither drugs nor alcohol has led her to this point. Instead, in 1996 she joined a New Age personal development group called Universal Knowledge, seeking clarity. Once McConkey converted to its aims, the group's leader, Natasha Lakaev, manipulated her, hit her, took hundreds of thousands of dollars from her, and worked her without pay for up to 22 hours a day, seven days a week.

McConkey spent the best years of her life in a cult. She only escaped earlier this year. What's frightening about her story is that this could happen to any of us.

Clinical Professor Doni Whitsett of the University of Southern California has been working with victims of cults and their families for 20 years. Carli's is "a tragic textbook case", she says.

Cults vary in theology and practice, but all employ similar techniques to recruit the unwary. Scientology uses the free personality test to suggest everyone has deficiencies that Scientology can best address; the Australian cult Kenja uses circus classes and the promise of counselling and personal growth; and the commune-based Australian group Jesus People uses the promise of a purer form of Christianity. Natasha Lakaev used a mish-mash of New Age theories and therapies, an end-times philosophy based on environmental disaster, and a powerful personality.

Lakaev vehemently denies all allegations, saying she does not run a cult and that McConkey is unstable. What she ran was "just a series of workshops", she says. But for well over a decade, a growing number of former acolytes have emerged with identical stories of a high-pressure, abusive organisation.

Most of us find it hard to believe that anybody could allow themselves to be brainwashed in the way McConkey claims. But Whitsett says people do not join cults, they are systematically recruited, often by charismatic narcissists whose need for adulation gives them the power to manipulate others. Their victims are not mentally ill or stupid. They are often of higher-than-

average intelligence, but they have vulnerabilities that the leader exploits and amplifies using powerful techniques known as "coercive persuasion" or "mind control". And like religious cults, personal development cults target people looking for guidance.

McConkey was 21 when she encountered a recruiter for Universal Knowledge, then known as Life Integration Programmes, at the 1996 Mind Body Spirit Festival in Sydney. "I was a bit lost . . . and I was definitely searching," she says. "I just wanted to have a psychic reading to have a bit of clarity on my direction . . . and [the reader] said basically, 'This course has everything you need to get over your insecurities, to build your self-esteem, get financial freedom, a great relationship' . . . The brochure said over 10,000 people have done the course. It all appeared very legitimate."

According to Whitsett, McConkey was vulnerable to these suggestions in part simply because she was in her early 20s the transition from adolescence to adulthood. "When people are 'searching', they are in an existential crisis, looking for answers to the great questions: 'Who am I? What is life all about?' They are . . . willing to suspend their own worldview and their own ideas for another that seems more promising."

McConkey took her discovery of Lakaev's northern NSW-based group as a metaphysical "sign". She immediately signed up to the course, "The Next Evolutionary Step".

In person, Lakaev was sexy, powerful, charismatic. She told attendees to keep an open mind, to "leave your logic at the door", to avoid "judgmentalism" a technique

cults use to silence the internal voice of reason. She introduced the group to a technique called "accessing" beating a black mat and yelling frustrations at parents, friends, teachers. She told them they needed to cleanse their "cellular memory" of the impurities of this and past lives, and those of their ancestors. They must live by "intuition" alone and if they did, they could "manifest" (or make) things happen in the real world. Wealth, happiness, success, relationships could all be "manifested" by the truly intuitive or "super-intelligent".

To McConkey it was inspiring. And though she had been told that the first course would fix everything, at the end the group was informed that to become fully "integrated", there were no fewer than 17 other courses, all at considerable expense, to do.

"It's a bait and switch," says Whitsett. People who believe an organisation to be credible and moderate have little fear of it, and can be drawn in further. Only later are they introduced to its more dangerous (and often more expensive) elements.

Melbourne woman Madeline Hardess, a university student and former private school captain, was lured into the Jesus People in 2004 by a man she met on a dating website. He did not initially mention that the three-bedroom house he lived in was actually a commune of up to 25 people, including two families of five.

He also did not reveal that, for food, they begged compost from grocery stores and ate the less putrid scraps. Nor did he say that the women were often beaten and yelled at. Only after a series of revelations

over eight months did the truth sink in. By the time it did, Hardess was engaged and was convinced that people on the outside were corrupt or evil. She wore a headscarf to signify her subservience to the men.

"Through that period you're so excited that you've found this new thing that you don't even question that much," she said.

"But then . . . it became a lot more intense and you had to quash thoughts . . . I used to be a feminist, but then you get to the point where you're not even allowed to shake men's hands."

For McConkey, the first Life Integration course convinced her she had dozens of "issues". She immediately signed up for two more. At the next course, "The Final Step", 70 people went to a rural property in a bus with the windows blacked out. They handed over phones, wallets and identification. Their "self" was being removed, as was any means of escape. For a week they were yelled at, punished, pressured to complete tasks in a short time. In the attempt to "cleanse" themselves, they were made to go hungry, and would often only get two hours of sleep a night. They paraded naked in front of the group, which McConkey found humiliating.

The next course was even more extreme. Called "Personal Mastery and Metaphysical Counselling", it cost \$10,000 and lasted a year. It featured a punishing daily regime including a strict vegan diet, a daily 10-kilometre run and drinking two litres of fruit juice.

"These techniques appear to be for health reasons but they actually have the effect of debilitation," says

Whitsett. "They reduce the person's ability to think critically, to reason, and when people are so weak the 'self' is impaired, they are easier to control and manipulate."

McConkey recalls seeing visions of "spirits" what Whitsett says were probably hallucinations or "waking dreams" caused by lack of sleep. Lakaev disputes these details, saying the vegan diet was only for a short time. One year's program, she admits, became "quite extreme" but she had tried to "settle it down".

Always a conscientious student, McConkey was desperate to succeed. But Lakaev's comments to her and others were 90 per cent negative, convincing them they needed to work harder.

Adrian Norman, a former member of Sydney cult Kenja, said an apparently random reward-punishment system kept him on edge for years. "You were built up as wonderful . . . and then a week or two later you are the worst person in the world and disgusting and smelly and no one would ever want to be with you. It's like couples in abusive relationships you go into a state of hyper-awareness and you can't think critically because you don't know if you're going to be attacked."

Whitsett says this "continuous barrage of attacks on the 'self' keeps the person in a continuous state of failure, of low self-esteem, and attached to the cult".

"They want to improve, to be better people, but they can never live up to the impossible standards set by the leader."

Cult members are also often deliberately disoriented, and outside influences removed to reduce

their ability to distinguish what's normal. McConkey says Lakaev insisted that she renounce her parents and never discuss anything that happened on the courses claims Lakaev denies. But Carli's mother, Robyn, remembers: "You'd just talk generally and she couldn't answer any simple questions because it pertained to what was happening up there, and it was all so secret. So there gradually just came a line where you didn't know what to talk about any more."

A Melbourne family, who wish to remain anonymous, say their son is being recruited by the Jehovah's Witnesses and they are watching him drift away from them as the cult's persuasive techniques prove "more powerful than the love of the family".

"To have a heartfelt relationship with one of your children and then to have a superficial, plastic relationship, it's gut-wrenching," says the father.

Cults also try to make it hard to find external, verifiable information. Lakaev uses lawyers to vigorously patrol public comment about her. She has legally pressured Google to remove links to websites critical of her and she is suing some former members for defamation over information they published on blogs.

Once Lakaev's disciples were hooked, their critical faculties broken down and their outside support cut off, Lakaev revealed her more extreme theology. McConkey says she claimed to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and one of the 12 members on the Intergalactic Council of the Universe. She came from the "Bird Tribes" from a different dimension and she

remembered all her past lives. In one of them she had been Queen of Atlantis. McConkey was told by Lakaev she had been a "lady in waiting" in Atlantis and she felt she was put on earth to serve her.

Lakaev also claimed "spirit guides" who live in the sky told her what to do. This gave her divine authority when she insisted that the planet would soon be destroyed and most people would perish. Lakaev, though, would survive with her followers and become the dominant political figure. Cult leaders often describe their god-like powers, saying that theirs is the power of life and death. A number of sources back up McConkey's claims, but Lakaev concedes only that "spirit guides" sometimes give her "very clear thoughts", and that, "from where I sit there are other dimensions that exist".

Of the other claims, though: "I do not consider myself the reincarnation of anything . . . There's no such thing as 12 members on an intergalactic council. These are just stories that we talked about, just stories to describe things and discuss things . . . They're just metaphors."

The end of the world, she claims, was not a prophecy. Her "survival" course was simply designed to help people cope if the worst did happen. McConkey vehemently stands by her version.

In her 13 years with Lakaev, McConkey completed 15 courses, some more than once, spending \$41,395 on fees, much of it begged or borrowed from her parents. She met a man, Michael, and married him. He spent \$34,540 on fees. Lakaev insinuated herself into

every aspect of McConkey's life. She was maid of honour at Carli and Michael's wedding. McConkey insisted that Lakaev, rather than her own mother, an experienced midwife, assist at the birth of her children.

In December 1999, McConkey began working for Lakaev in the office without wages, and also cleaning and maintaining her properties. She and Michael bought a share in Lakaev's company, Universal Knowledge, for \$20,000, believing they were buying equity, securing their future. They received nothing in return. Company documents show \$420,000 was raised from investors in this manner, and Lakaev admits none have seen a return.

Lakaev later came up with spurious excuses to make McConkey and her husband pay her a further \$140,000, claiming they were debts they owed. Both worked second and third jobs to pay this back. McConkey estimates that Lakaev owes them another \$440,000 for their free labour over nine years.

Lakaev also convinced McConkey to seek an apprehended violence order against her parents and her brother. The court rejected the applications after McConkey gave misleading evidence. Lakaev claims instead that she had tried to help McConkey reconcile with her parents.

McConkey and her husband had more than one period apart as they dealt with the psychological and financial pressures imposed by Lakaev. In the meantime, McConkey says she was psychologically abused and physically assaulted by Lakaev, and was separated from her sons because Lakaev convinced

her she was a "human f--- up". Lakaev also once beat McConkey's young son with a wooden spoon, she says.

Lakaev denies any physical abuse, saying McConkey was the violent one, who had "done some very strange things with her kids". "She's going to end up in court herself . . . Carli's one of these girls who goes to psychics 24/7; she's not really that stable."

Lakaev's supporters, who phoned The Sunday Age after my interview with her last week, said Lakaev was the victim of jealousy because she was a strong, independent businesswoman. They said they had seen McConkey leaving her young children home alone when she went to work. McConkey admits neglecting her children at times, but says she was forced to in the attempt to fulfil Lakaev's demands.

For 13 years she stayed in thrall to the cult, living on or near Lakaev's northern NSW property, Omaroo. The promise of "survival", the hope of financial reward (from her shareholding in Universal Knowledge), and the occasional compliment was enough to keep her loyal. But in March 2009, in a state of exhaustion, McConkey agreed to something she will regret forever.

"After the birth of my first son, from age 27, Natasha would tell me I was abusive, a liar and a manipulator and I shouldn't look after any children. She started saying, 'You should get sterilised'," McConkey recalls.

"After eight years, two more children and being repeatedly told to get sterilised, I gave in. I was separated from my husband at that time and I just knew I wouldn't be able to cope with another child in that environment and I thought, 'Well, I'll just do it now'."

McConkey is strong. Many former cult members can never speak about their experiences. But after just nine months away from Lakaev, she held her nerve throughout her account to me. When she tells me about the sterilisation though, the tears flow.

"The doctor said, 'Are you sure you want to do this? You've still got 10 years of fertility left'. I said, 'No, it's what I want'. But it wasn't. Someone else had placed that idea in my head. I did it purely for her, to be able to focus more on her and her needs . . .

"After I left this year, I was in the girls' clothing section at Big W and I just had to really grieve that I wasn't able to have a little girl."

McConkey says the process of cult indoctrination had led her, inch by inch, to a place she could never have imagined. But Lakaev denies having any role in McConkey's decision. "I was a friend of Carli's . . . We had a symbiotic relationship," Lakaev says.

Finally, in January this year, McConkey could handle no more. She picked up her children and drove away into what she believed was certain death at doomsday. "I was exhausted, had been beaten up again and was unable to cope with any more psychological and emotional pressure. I just said to myself, 'I don't care if I die in two years' time, I would prefer to be free and enjoy my children'."

The feeling of freedom was almost immediate. But McConkey deals with shame and guilt over things she has done to her children, her family, her husband and other cult members. Some family members still will not talk to her. And she finds it difficult to plan for anything

after armageddon, which Lakaev prophesied would be December 12, 2012.

"I believe about 50 per cent that 'Survival' is going to happen and I just hope that it's not going to," McConkey says. "If I wake up on the 13th [of December] and nothing has happened I'm just going to celebrate and hope to God that whoever is still caught up with that woman is just going to get up and leave."

People sometimes ask why cult members do not simply exercise their free will and run away. But Kenja escapee Adrian Norman says his free will was reduced to a "pilot light" while in the cult. Mind control techniques are subtle and powerful. They turn your own mind against you.

"Prison walls and chains are not necessary when one believes these things," says Whitsett.

The good news is people can escape and recover, and McConkey is determined to do so. "I go through bouts of feeling really down but I know I can get out of them because I don't want to be depressed any more . . . I still feel angry, but I don't feel as much fear."

Alleged leader of cult works as psychologist

Michael Bachelard

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The Sunday Age

A WOMAN accused of leading a cult that has damaged the lives of scores of people is working as a psychologist with vulnerable patients at a community mental health service in Queensland.

Natasha Lakaev's Universal Knowledge organisation was offering courses until last year that prophesied the world would end in December 2012 and almost everyone except her devotees would die.

A former member of her inner circle, Carli McConkey, has told The Sunday Age that Ms Lakaev was physically violent and psychologically manipulative, and had persuaded her followers that she was the Queen of Atlantis, a reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and one of 12 members of the Intergalactic Council of the Universe.

Ms Lakaev is now working as a government-employed psychologist at the Ashmore Community Mental Health Service near Surfers Paradise.

However, after The Sunday Age raised questions about her history, Queensland Health agreed to investigate the claims against her, and invited "anyone with concerns" to raise them with authorities.

Ms Lakaev denies all the claims of her former followers, saying she did not run a cult, had never been violent, and the theological claims were merely

“metaphors”, adding, “this stuff has been taken completely out of context”.

Complaints against her by former acolytes have been investigated once by Queensland’s health regulator, but no action taken. The national health regulator will not comment except to say Ms Lakaev “has current registration and is therefore deemed fit to practise”.

Ms Lakaev’s lawyers wrote last December that she was working as a case manager.

“A large proportion of her clients are often initially highly unstable with disorders such as schizophrenia, delusional disorders, major depression, major anxiety and personality disorders,” the letter said. “Forensic clients with homicidal backgrounds are also present on the clinic client list.”

Ms Lakaev has faced criticism for more than a decade about the extreme practices on her courses, and accusations that she was a practitioner of “coercive persuasion” or mind control techniques.

Ms McConkey, who spent 13 years under Ms Lakaev’s sway and only escaped in January this year, said Ms Lakaev had hit her and exploited her.

Ms McConkey lived on or near Ms Lakaev’s northern NSW property, Omaroo, near Burringbar, for many years, and during that time handed over \$140,000 and spent nine years working without pay in her office.

“Natasha Lakaev should in no way be a registered psychologist,” Ms McConkey said.

Ms Lakaev's business, Universal Knowledge, is styled as a new age personal development course. It has not offered courses since last year, but the program promises to cleanse the "cellular memory" of its participants and help them take the "next evolutionary step" by lifting them into the fourth dimension.

Ms Lakaev told The Sunday Age she had not worked with the business for many years.

However, she founded the business in 1999 and she is listed on the website as "guiding individuals and groups for over 20 years in cellular memory cleansing". It is based at her property and is run by one of her devotees, and she and her children own 75 per cent of the shares.

She begged The Sunday Age not to refer to her work at Ashmore. She said: "I don't harm people, I'm really good at my job, my clients are fine, my patients are fine."