

The Blanket Makers

An invisible traumatised child inside a young womans body had to keep everyone alive.

So much weight on already tired shoulders slumped with the burden of toxic responsibility too great for any one person to bear.

Capable working woman who had learnt to believe that to be loved meant vulnerability, pain, shame, loneliness, guilt, blame and violence.

Six scared very little children's eyes seeking comfort from two exhausted adult eyes clouded by confusion, fear and shock.

When we fled I had decided that if we were going to die we would die fighting. God was with us. We escaped to unknown places in the same but different world. Death was more real than life.

The abuser was clever. He was good at abuse. After we fled he transferred his abuse to others that I loved. To protect and save the others I was asked by someone whom I loved and trusted to return with my little children back to the violence that we had fled from. I froze. But I did not do this. I could not do this as I knew that we would never get away again. But now the blame and responsibility for others also shifted to me. Sadly the others rewrote our painful reality to absolve themselves from helping us. I understood. He was truly frightening and unpredictable. I became completely responsible for all of the abuse. It was my fault. I felt guilty and ashamed when others were harmed.

We were brave but others around us were not. We learnt to be more brave. We became more damaged.

We were bonded by love and trauma. Three little children and a young woman. No one wanted to understand. We were different. We were a war torn family living in a country at peace. Invisible and exposed. We had no one to protect us.

It did not take long for him to find us. Constant stalking and threatening behaviour by the abuser led me nervously down the path to apply for a Domestic Violence Order Of Restraint. I was terrified about his response to this. I was now formally exposing his secret abuses.

He took the children and refused to return them for some time. I was strongly advised to apply for Custody to The Family Court of South Australia. Throughout this process we went into hiding again. Then our worlds completely changed. A cold detached woman in a Court ordered my children to go back to the violence without me. On their own. She called this Access. I could not comprehend on any level why she was saying this. Surely she had read what my Lawyer had written about all of the violence perpetrated towards us throughout and after the marriage. Why did she not understand? She didn't know us. She would never know us. She did not care. She did not try to understand. No one would listen. How do I tell my children? My children were Court ordered back to the abuse alone. I was absolutely terrified for them. My worst fear had come true. Their worst fear had come true. When we fled I had not known about the words Domestic Violence. I had not known about Courts. When I applied for Custody I did not know about Access. I did not understand how this could be allowed to happen. I had never left my children with him alone.

When I told my children they looked at me helpless and confused. One of my children nearly fainted. It was one of the worst moments of my life. They did not want to go. To reduce their fear I pretended that it would be ok. But they knew as I knew that this was not true. A special bond had been broken. I had lied to my children about their safety. I had to handover my three small, pale faced very frightened children back to the violent and angry man who had many guns and no boundaries. The man we had all fled from. The man who was stalking us and still threatening to murder us. The man who did not care if the people he abused were little or big. But now my little children had to go back on their own without me to protect them.

Again six scared very little children's eyes looked at me. But now I could not protect them.

After they left I could not breathe as I sobbed uncontrollably all night on the floor of our empty home. Nothing made sense anymore. It was then that I noticed a different black feeling surrounding me. Everything had changed.

My children were gone. On their own, my little children had to keep going back to the violence we had fled. I was not allowed to protect them from him anymore. They could not protect themselves. They were too little. They were three, four and seven years of age. No one else could protect them when they were with him. I had betrayed my children. The Family Court had taken from me my Mothers right to protect my children and had not replaced it with any other form of protection. The Family Court had betrayed us. We were helpless. I wished that we had never fled. At least before we fled I had been there to protect them. Another real fear that I had, was that he had always used my children to cause me maximum harm. For years he had harmed me by harming the children. Also his constant mantra to me had been "you need to watch out when I have nothing left to lose". At Access he would shout to me out of the car window as he drove off with my children "I hope that you said goodbye to them as it may be the last time that you ever see them". My poor little children sitting in the back of the car. His only leverage to get me to return was to harm the children.

Every child has the right to be protected. My children had the right to be protected. It is every parents responsibility to protect their children from harm. To keep them safe. With every abusive and threatening taunt from him I feared that I would never see them again. Each time they went that different black feeling came back. It became familiar. It would get so thick and big that I could not breathe. It was like a black blanket. When they came home I thought I could see little children black blankets neatly tucked around their tired and harmed little minds and bodies. Still no one listened. No one cared about black blankets, big or small.

I tried to talk to my children about their black blankets but it did not make any sense as they still had to go to violence on their own. No words made sense. You see it was me who packed their bags and took them to a Police Station where I handed them over. The Police Officers were busy and harsh and said that they had no time or patience for such matters as handover of children. They did not care that the Family Court had ordered this. They said that I was Breaching my Restraint Order by meeting with my ex-husband. This was another thing that did not make any sense to me. Sometimes the Police Officers were as frightening as the abuser. I had to continue to pretend that it was all ok. I did not want to further frighten the children. It all became so complicated. I had to make choices that no mother should have to make. My children had to endure abuses at Access that no children should have to endure.

Over the years I told Family Court Counsellors and many other Counsellors about his abuse of my children. They did not listen properly and did nothing to stop it. Later my children spoke to Counsellors. The Counsellors taught my children strategies about how to manage his abuse. They did nothing to stop it. I told Police about his continued stalking and threatening behaviour. They did nothing to stop it. These people normalised the abuse of my children and me. We were treated often with disdain. We were seen as different to others. Somewhere along the way we were viewed as lesser beings not entitled to respect and normal response. We had become defined by his violence. A dysfunctional family. Much later, in front of my children one Counsellor blamed me for allowing them to go to Access. My mind was constantly spinning with confusion and guilt. So many people so many words but nothing changing.

Ironically at my place of work I was mandated to report Child Abuse. My reports were taken seriously. As a mother when I reported the abuse of my own children I was not taken seriously and treated with suspicion.

The abuser quickly realised that he would not be held to any account for anything that he did. He learnt how to play the Courts. You see a Federal Family Court was supposed to protect my children and I was supposed to be protected by a State Magistrate Court and the South Australian Police. Although we were a family our protection came under two different Court systems. These two Courts never communicated with each other. The Family Court granted Access when there were five Orders Of Restraint taken out against him. So no one ever saw the whole true picture of our lives which were filled with his ongoing abuse and control. With no one to stop him his abuse and control over us became emboldened. The Court systems lessened our ability to protect ourselves against him as he became more and more powerful and ruthless. The Family Court and the South Australian Police offered no meaningful protection to us whatsoever. We soon learnt that if I reported any of his abusive behaviour to either Court and he learnt of this he would make sure that my children suffered more at their next Access visit. My children and I were again silenced. We continued to live between two worlds – one of togetherness and love and one of separateness and danger. For over ten years he maintained a high level of rage at me for not returning to him.

Desperate, alone, frightened, vulnerable and tired I grasped onto others to strengthen me. To help us. But they emotionally weakened and disrespected us further. Strength, calmness, clarity and a sense of self is needed to discern. You see my sense of self had been stolen a long time ago. My strength was used to keep us alive and there is no place for calmness with abuse. Clarity was not even in the running as I was constantly confused by what was happening to us through the Court systems and his continued abuse towards us. New wreckers of happiness had appeared. Our black blankets got heavier and thicker. Sometimes they merged into one when we were together and became separate when we were apart. The many times when fear was absolute I felt paralysed and suffocated by the weight and blackness of my blanket. But with my children we found little holes of light and we crawled out exhausted.

Three childhoods of abuse slipped by. When their childhoods were over and they no longer had to go to the abuse they told me about some of the abuses that they had suffered throughout Access. My heart was broken even further. This was not what I had planned for my children. Innocence and childhoods taken. So many unknown words not spoken. Why had this been allowed to happen? I

had tried so hard to stop it. I prayed to God that I would not become bitter and vengeful. My God knew what had gone on. Sanity was such a fine line.

Despite our blankets and many years of fear and abuse we limped and ran with grimaced faces and giggles to a somewhat safer place. Over the years we found a permanent home, work, schools and friends. We created our own world built on love and complexities beyond normal human experience. We survived without safety and we did our best to thrive. Our weighted feet, small and big rocked forward and backward until more forward won out.

Too soon and with pride and a smile and grief in my heart I waved goodbye to each of my children as they walked away to begin their own grown lives. I watched with sadness as their own grown blankets followed quietly behind each one of them. I went back inside to mine.

Alone my black blanket became merciless. It was the same blanket but now there was only me under it. I did not know how to find the holes of light without my children. I could not breathe and my still weighted feet rocked only backwards not forward. I had been responsible for those small lives and I had betrayed them. I had never been forced to go back to the violence. I had kept only myself safe. I should never have left. I should have stayed with the abuser. At least I could have protected my children if we had stayed together.

It was all my fault. I had harmed my own children. The threads of the blanket grew thicker and stronger. Interwoven threads of guilt, shame, blame, deep sadness, loneliness, fear, self-hatred, anxiety and anger worked tirelessly to ensure I never got out. The blackness at times suffocated me. It woke me at night as I panicked to free myself. I hated my weak self. I had chosen to love people who had harmed me and us. I had let people take from me until there was nothing left. I deserved this. My family and the Church were right. Had always been right. I was defective, sinful and harmful. I had only myself to blame. You see the relentless and cruel stealers of self and the wreckers of happiness had been tirelessly at work since I was very young. They had prepared me well for the makers of blankets.

Suppressed, vivid brightly lit memories of my childrens trauma came back to haunt me even in sleep. Guilt and self-loathing about things I should have done. But I knew one thing. No one must ever truly know who and what I was. I stopped seeing friends. At home the blanket and I became one. No exhausting pretense. I took it off when I went to work. It waited for me until I came home. The blanket was the only thing that truly knew who and what I was. It was always there. It knew I was responsible for my childrens abuse, pain and trauma. And you see one beautiful, innocent child never ever really came back to me. His trauma and anger were too big to return to me. Sadly I had run out of time to change things. There was not enough time between when his Access abuse stopped and when he emotionally left me.

When he was sixteen and his trauma and anger were growing I took him to another Counselling service. They acknowledged his anger and pain but they turned him away as my son told them that he did not want to be there. I had tried so hard and for so long to actually get him there. My last chance to get him help was gone. The agonising irony. He no longer had to go to the abuser. But now he had learnt ways to forget the pain and trauma by harming himself. He became angry and detached from those of us who loved him the most. So much damage. So much potential stolen. Many, many things left unsaid. I was inconsolable. I was to blame.

For many years chronic illness had become a part of my life. Eventually it became so bad that I had to stop working. Grief and sadness enveloped me again. I had always loved my work. I had been good at it. Now it was just me and the blanket. No reason now to take it off at all. Ferociously the blanket set to work. I was sent to someone who named my blackness PTSD. But she did not understand about blankets. The blackness thickened and became even darker. Still no one understood. The blanket started to completely smother me. I was too tired now. It had gone on for too long. I still saw those six scared, little children's eyes. There was no comfort to be found for any of us. I could no longer look at my children, grandchildren or family photographs without feeling pain, guilt and shame. The blanket was winning. The pain was absolute. Somehow, somewhere God was still with me.

With every ounce of strength I met a friend. The blanket and I carefully weighed up if we could trust. We calmly told her about blackness and tiredness. We told her that we had found the way out. She calmly told us that she did not like this way out. She gave us a name and a telephone number.

I made an appointment. After more than thirty years of speaking with professional people I finally had met someone who knew about blankets. She did not want to just speak to me and my blanket. She knew how smart we were at talking. She wanted to crawl under it with me. Amazed the blanket rebelled and wound tighter around me. She did not give up. She gently fought her way under my blanket. She sat with me. Only my children had done this. She said different words to me that at first I did not understand. My blanket was quiet. I did not have to find words. I just had to feel. For the first time in many, many years I felt safe. A connection was made between my mind and body. For the first time ever, someone else witnessed, understood and acknowledged my pain. She did not despise me for what I had done to my children.

My body traced its story of pain and grief. I was amazed. We spoke about blanket makers, stealers of self and wreckers of happiness. I could feel my blanket gradually and quietly separate from me. Over time body tears filled with shame, blame, pain, grief and helplessness slowly loosened the cruel and manipulative weaving of many. I also saw my own weaving that was often done with weighted feet and rocking backwards. In time the blackness faded into weightless threads of light until it slowly gently floated away. And then it was gone. I was amazed how this had happened. I was now able to continue to heal properly.

Body lighter. Shoulders straighter. Feet weightless. I am invisible no more. I want to live. I am older. I now clearly see and understand this very thin, sad, brave, tired, frightened, confused young woman. So alone. So ashamed. So responsible for everyone. No one to help her. She was the only one who had tried relentlessly over so many years to keep her children alive and safe. She just wanted the abuse to stop. When she had failed she blamed herself. I feel so sorry for her. I now know about blame, shame and responsibility. She was so kind and brave and strong. All she wanted was for her children to be loved, safe and happy. She also had just wanted to be loved, safe and happy.

She absolutely loved her children and she tried everything she possibly could to keep them safe. When she couldn't keep them safe she had helped to keep them alive through agonising and hideous decisions that she had to make on the spur of the moment. Decisions that no mother should have to make. She had given everything that she had to her beautiful, precious children. It may not have been enough at times but even then it was everything that she had. I know this now. I did the best I could. It had to be enough because it was all that I had.

For the first time I feel somewhat consoled. A beautiful Counsellor said to me that although I could not always keep my children safe, in the end I had managed to keep them sane. I no longer fear happiness. I will honour this strong and gentle woman by continuing to live my life with hope and love. Even in my moments of deep sadness and absolute grief I no longer accept any blame, shame and responsibility that are not mine. I am one of the strongest people that I know. I let light and love win. And who knows but maybe one day my son will come back to me. I will continue to wait, hope and pray that this happens. But it will be in his time. I understand this because I am his mother.

I have written this paper in honour of my children who are the bravest people that I have ever met. They are truly good people.



Written in 2021

The Blanket Makers

Part Two

After we fled in the late 1980's we endured and survived two Courts who dealt with Domestic Violence situations. The Family Court Of South Australia (The Family Court) who Ordered Custody of our children to myself and Access of our children to their father and The South Australian Magistrates Courts Division (The Magistrates Court) who Ordered an Order Of Restraint to protect me but not my children from my ex-husband. It was the role of The South Australian Police (SAPOL) to enforce any Breaches of the Order Of Restraint. Please note that the terminology I use in this paper is the terminology that was used at the time of our experiences.

It appeared that the Family Court and the Magistrates Court never communicated with each other about our situation. This never made any sense to me as we were one family. An example of this is that The Family Court granted my ex-husband Access to the children when there were five Orders of Restraint against him through the Magistrates Court.

Also the Orders from these two separate Courts often contradicted each other for example in our situation Access Handover was Ordered by The Family Court to take place at our local Police Station. But the Police Officers at the Police Station angrily told me that I was Breaching the Order Of Restraint by having contact with my ex-husband at Access Handover. Their attitude made Handover even more complicated and terrifying.

On one occasion when my ex-husband did not allow one of my children to return to me after Access I contacted SAPOL who informed me that it was a Federal Matter because of the Family Court Order. When I contacted the Federal Police they told me that I had to wait 24 hours before they could act. This was one of the most terrifying times of my life as I know it was for my child.

When I was requested to attend Court Hearings at the Family Court with my ex-husband, The Family Court always ensured that safety measures were enforced at those times and at any other times that we were Court Ordered to meet at the same time. Because of my ex-husbands threatening behavior throughout our Divorce Hearing, when the Hearing was finished I was escorted by my Lawyer and Federal Court Officer down stairways and lifts and then to the front door of the Building. They then waved goodbye to me as they stood on the front steps of the building. I remember looking back at them as I slowly walked away knowing that my ex-husband would be waiting for me somewhere up the street. And he was.

This seemed bizarre to me that his violence was acknowledged as a potential threat to me and possibly others and yet they had Court Ordered Access to him of the children. I often wondered who they were actually protecting with their safety measures because it certainly was not me or my children.

Unfortunately throughout the years most legal outcomes were as crazy making for us as the life that we had led before we fled. Forget about providing protection I believe that at times we were actually exposed to more danger because of these two Courts.

What complicated things further was the expectation that I understood and knew how to navigate this new world of words, rules, Courts and services. I had never heard the words Domestic Violence until after we had fled. The saddest thing is that when I was referred to the Family Court and SAPOL I truly believed that they would understand about what was happening to us and that they would help me to protect my children. I trusted them.

But sadly over time my children learnt as I did that no one would listen to us about his abuses to them/us. My children endured so many abuses through Court Ordered Access. Basically they just had to endure and survive the abuses. Even as I write this it sounds incomprehensible. But I reported every abuse that the children told me about. I made reports to The Family Court and the Child Protection Services at the time. My reports were minimised and negated by the workers from the services. I felt that I was not being taken seriously or believed. For example when I contacted a Family Court Counsellor and reported Access abuse of my children, his response was that I had to remember that we were all better off now as the children only had to see their father twice a fortnight and not every day like before we left. Upon reflection it was like once people realised that Domestic Violence was involved their attitudes towards my reports about my children seemed to become indifferent. I had the same experience of this with SAPOL and the Child Protection Services. I will never understand this.

The response of these Services to my reports flew in the face of every Child Protection Law in Australia at the time. Honestly how were those responses in keeping with the The Child Protection Act in Australia? This I will never ever understand and accept. Ironically when I made reports of Child Abuse in my Professional working capacity my reports were taken seriously as I was always given a Priority/Tier rating depending on the severity of the abuse that I reported.

No child should ever have to accept that nothing can be done to keep them safe. No parent should have to accept this either. Please understand how difficult it was for my small children to tell me about the abuse. And then the fear I felt when reporting the abuse as I was so frightened that he would harm them more on Access once he found out about the report. It was certainly not anything that we did lightly. He did harm them more when I reported his abuse. Consequently my children stopped telling me. The Court systems had enabled him to silence us again.

His rage and unpredictable behavior remained a constant source of anxiety in our lives and thinking. Even when the children were older he continued to be a threatening presence in our lives. This did not stop until the children were old enough to stop going to Access. I honestly would not have fled with the children if I had known what was going to happen to them. No wonder I felt so responsible for every abusive thing that they endured. Upon reflection to deal with this ongoing abuse and trauma we had to shut down a part of ourselves to survive especially when the children went to Access.

Access was like a thick tight rope around our necks and this rope was firmly held by him. He controlled when he would tighten or loosen that rope. A life lived between real and perceived threats and harm. He weaponised Access. He abused the children to harm me. It was a truly effective weapon.

Although the legal system made it impossible for me to keep my children safe when they went to Access, I was the only person in the whole world trying to protect my children and when I couldn't it

was me who felt responsible. It was me who had to pack their bags and take them to him for Access. It was me that they returned to after Access each time a little bit more broken. I also felt responsible that I could not make myself be heard when I was reporting his abuses of them. And ultimately it was me that had gone to the Family Court to initiate proceedings. And of course it was me who had taken them with me when we fled. And it was me who did not have to return to his violence.

His stalking was relentless and continued for many, many years. If you want to send someone insane stalk them. Most Breaches of Restraint Order went unpunished as he left before the Police arrived. At times he even tried to run us off the road in his car.

If I had reported that a stranger was abusing my children I am sure that there would have been a different response. In the earlier years I knew what the abuse was, who the abuser was and when and where it happened. I cannot imagine any person other than their father being allowed to continually abuse our children over the course of their childhoods. Nor do I believe that a stranger would have been allowed to stalk and threaten us for all those years. Whether it is a stranger or someone known to you control is control, stalking is stalking, abuse is abuse, child abuse is child abuse, fear is fear, murder is murder and dead is dead. And abuse and death are a huge price to pay for having once loved someone.

I honestly do not know how we remained even remotely sane. Anxiety was/is no stranger to any of us. I often wonder about those shut down parts of ourselves.

I never recovered financially. I never asked for my equal share of the house, property and business that we had established as I did not want to anger him further as I knew my children would suffer more when they were with him on Access. Also he never paid Child Support as he had his own business and his own Accountant so we lived without much money. But we always made the best of everything. Overall all that I ever wanted was for my children to be safe and happy and loved. After my children left home I became unwell and consequently was not financially able to re-enter the housing market.

All forms of Domestic Violence are psychological abuse.

I believe that the language/definition has to change about Domestic Violence. I do not like the words Domestic Violence as I believe that there are too many historical and currently held value based judgements associated with the term on a societal, Religious, political, policing and legal level. In our case over ten years after we fled we were still viewed by SAPOL as a family of Domestic Violence. I divorced him two years after we fled from him. So why were his continued abuses and stalking of us all still called Domestic Violence? I was no longer in a relationship with him. The narrative has to change.

The word Domestic implies home and relationship, shared responsibility and thus lends itself to the many associated questions about blame. I also believe that children become invisible in this equation as the focus is on the two adults in the relationship. What he did to our children was child abuse but his abuse somehow just got caught up in the overall banner of Domestic Violence. I was not with him when he abused the children on Access so why did Domestic Violence have anything to do with this? I also do not like the term survivors of Domestic Violence. If the children and I have to be called survivors then please use the term correctly as we are survivors of Domestic Violence and

The Family Court and Policing response to Domestic Violence. At one point I was called a survivor at the same time that my children were still being abused by him on Access.

Many States have fought for and implemented changes to Domestic Violence. Coercive control laws and the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence are examples of this. But unfortunately many of these changes have been preceded by further deaths of women and children and are often advocated for by families and/or advocacy groups. For goodness sake by now there should have been a complete National Domestic Violence Response to the deaths of women and children. Domestic Violence and Child Abuse have both been classified as Criminal Offenses in Australia for a very long time now. I just don't understand any of this at all.

Without strong and effective National changes to laws and policy, value based judgements will continue to be made alongside the many discretionary laws relating to Domestic Violence. In the 1990's I was involved with many Domestic Violence Education Sessions. Over 34 years later the same issues regarding Domestic Violence are still being discussed. I often wonder while these discussions have continued over these 34 years just how many women and children have actually been harmed or murdered.

Thankfully in the case of the King Hit it seemed that effective new laws and policy were implemented with a sense of urgency with the required resources alongside education. The name was changed from King Hit to Cowards Punch. Just two simple word changes exposed a King Hit to that of a Cowards Punch. No one likes cowards. Immediately the sense of power and control was removed from this violent act. The collective narrative is changed. So continuing with the theme of cowardly violent behaviour why not name Domestic Violence 'Cowards Violence'?

I wonder what would happen if an abuser Coward punched his partner inside or outside of their home. Would this offense come under Domestic Violence or the new Coward Punch Laws?


There is still an element of disbelief and confusion for me about our story. No one will ever know about all of his violence towards me and my children. I do not know about all of his violence towards my children. But for whatever reason he chose not to murder us. I know that if he had wanted to murder us he would have. He had the rage, the opportunity and nothing morally to deter him. But he absolutely made us suffer. He harmed us all. All I wanted and kept asking for throughout those horrendous years after we fled was for someone to just listen to me and believe me and then at least try to help us. I kept asking "what about my children?" I will always wonder if it would have made any difference if someone in the Judicial System or the Policing System had actually just tried to help us. If only someone had actually told him just once that he would be held to account if he did not stop abusing and harming us. Or if the Family Court when ordering Access had ensured that his Access visits were supervised or at least monitored and/or that some reporting system and legal recourse had been put in place for the children to try to ensure their safety.

This is quite simply a story of a normal, young woman who with her children had fled abuse to try and keep them alive. The complexity of the story is of the making of others. Historically and currently many women and children have been incredibly brave and courageous in the face of this violence. I know many things have changed since our experiences in the late 1980's. But the Australian media still inform us that in Australia one woman a week is murdered by her current or previous partner and on a weekly basis multiple women present to Hospital Emergency

Departments with sustained injuries from current or previous partners. Children have also been murdered by their father when their mother has tried to flee with them to a safer place.

Truly this is a long term National disgrace. When will someone in Australia be brave enough to truly stand up and finally put a stop to this violence? To demand womens and childrens equal right to safety inside and outside of their homes. The long term effects of domestic violence are immeasurable.

I also often wonder if anything would have been done differently if on a regular basis and for countless decades women had been murdering and or harming men and their children.

 and all the other wonderful women who have journeyed with me for over 40 years. I also thank all the people who have fought and continue to fight for change.

Written in 2023/2024

When a suppressed pride is all that you keeps you alive
And you are controlled by incomprehensible fear
By the one who insists that he loves us so much
Or else why would he be here
To see fear in your childrens eyes as huddled together they scream
You feel sure that you are in the middle of a really horrible dream.

But you stand calm and composed and pray to the Lord
Once again please let us come to no harm
Let us please be safe
Escape to a place
But where can we go?
It's my husband, their dad and we're home.

Written in 1987