Girl??? I'm a Woman Now!

A six year photographic documentary focusing on twelve teenage girls and their transition into adulthood.

This exegesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Photography) by Research

Carla Gottgens
B.F.A. (Honours)

School of Creative Media
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
December 2008
Declaration by the Candidate

I, Carla Gottgens, declare that:

except where due acknowledgement has been made, this work is mine alone;

a) this work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part, to qualify for any other academic award;

b) the content of the exegesis is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved program;

c) editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Signed: __________________________ Date: __________________________
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Christopher Stewart and Dr. Shaun Wilson and the RMIT University. Thank you also to Andrew Trounson for his support and editing advice, Pam Kleemann for her research and editing assistance, Helen Frajman for her feedback in the early stages of the project and Dr. John Storey my initial first supervisor.

A special thank you to the thirteen girls who volunteered to take part and allowed me in to their lives over the period of six years from 2002 to 2008. Amanda, Alex, Danya, Feven, Lynda, Katie, Shayna, Nisa, Angie, Erin, Zoe, Priyanka and Eleanor (surnames withheld for privacy reasons).
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Abstract

This photographic documentary seeks to record the transition from teenager into adulthood of twelve girls living in Melbourne, Australia between 2002 and 2008. Throughout the process of the project the artist has sought to challenge the assumption that reaching adulthood can be defined by achieving certain milestones in society, and that the transition period is as much about personal self-realisation on the part of the individual, as it is about measurements set by society. The photographic work is accompanied by text in the form of quotes taken from audio interviews conducted throughout the documentation process. This paper compares the ideas set by society about the process of becoming an adult and the real life events that triggered this transition period in this particular group of girls.
Introduction

This paper seeks to challenge notions that a teenager’s transition into adulthood can simply be measured by the achievement of certain milestones. (Sweet, 1998) This research project has sought to create photographic work that has explored, and as a consequence validated, the idea that becoming an adult is just as much about personal self-realisation on the part of the individual, as it is about measurements set by society.

This project has sought to document photographically the transition into adulthood of a diverse group of twelve girls in Melbourne, Australia, over six years. At the start of the project, they were in their final year of secondary school at the age of seventeen and eighteen.

The aim was to show through photography, that within our society, undertaking adult roles as defined by research, does not necessarily make an adult. The approach was to produce a body of artwork reflecting this theme but also one that engaged the viewer and invited them into someone else’s personal world at a key time (the transition from adolescence to adulthood), inviting the viewer to reflect on their own experience, prompted by a combination of text and imagery.

The approach was inspired by my own personal appreciation of the way photo albums become sources of memory.

I argue that the process of becoming an adult is not an obvious one and cannot simply be a number of achievements or goals set by society. (Sweet, 1998) (Stranger-Ross et. al., 2005) I believe that many influences contribute enormously to the process, influences that are both seemingly trivial and usually not mentioned or rated as relevant in previous research. (Markello, 2005)
From observing the life changes that affected my own peers and shaped their adulthood, I wanted to record the stages of self-realisation from the subject’s point of view and provide a mirror in which the viewer could read and identify their own past through the images of these young women.

Chapter One explores the relationship between memory and photography. My research regards the importance of photographs in how our familiar and collective memory often draws upon the photographic image from a family album or through public imagery to reconstruct our pasts. Within this discourse the transition from teenager to adulthood is explored drawing on research into past generation concepts and ideas of what it means to become an adult and how this is rapidly changing in modern society.

Chapter Two highlights how this documentary project sits alongside styles from various forms of documentary photographic practice. It focuses on photographers who have used various documentary techniques to create a narrative and a transition in time and how these different documentary practices relate to my own process in recording twelve teenage girls and their transition to adulthood.

The young female as subject, and the focus on the everyday as a theme, also tie in to how this project is placed within its field. Artists such as Katy Grannan, Lise Sarfati, Tina Barney and Rineke Dijkstra have all used either young females and/or the domestic environment, and the everyday within their work.

This chapter highlights recent and historical documentary photographic practices, as well as other forms of photographic practice that incorporate text as part of the artwork by artists, for example the work of Ken Lum and Tracey Moffatt, and how this affects our way of reading an image. The concept of reading the change in a photographic subject over a period of time and the juxtaposition of text is one of the main focuses of the approach to how the images were posed and taken.
within this series of work. The narrative within each image accompanied by the text creates an episodic story that can be read just as one reads a photograph album that reflects a person's life.

Chapter Three describes the process of making this documentary project and offers a formal introduction to the girls who took part. This chapter highlights three key areas. The first is the individual transition process of each of the girls providing a contrast to support the discourse of this exegesis that the process of becoming an adult cannot only be measured by achieving certain milestones in Australian society. The second is how the parameters outlined by sociological research into the transition from teenager to adulthood need to incorporate the significance of personal change and self-realisation. The third refers to and explains the problems encountered with following twelve strangers and how their attitude shaped the context of the project and to some extent dictated what was and wasn't included in the body of work.

The Conclusion summarises my research findings and presents the alternative argument that both self-realisation and individual personal events trigger the transition from teenager into adult; that this transition is not achieved solely through the accumulation of milestones.

Appendix A contains the transcripts of the interviews conducted with the girls over the six year period.
Chapter One

Whilst each family photographic album is a uniquely personal collection of memories, each photograph, however, will contain a familiar setting or theme that can connect with others through the process of long-term memory. (Hirsch, 1999) In spite of the subjective nature of these albums, Marianne Hirsch (1999) suggested that family pictures are often shaped by similar conventions, and are readily identifiable across the broadest and most radical divides.

Hirsch (1999) argued that although family photographs trigger an inclusive, affiliative look that embraces images of vastly different cultural origins, the familial setting can be used as a screen or safety barrier when considered in terms of cultural memory and cultural histories. Martha Langford (2001) also identified the act of recognising ourselves in other peoples family histories, stating that such recognition created a predictability in keeping with our desire for belonging and stability.

This commonality is echoed within my project. The photographed transition period of each of the girls from teenager to adulthood is not the only focus of the project. How the end product will be read and how the images will be displayed will rely on the viewer engaging with their own past memories to connect and interpret the time line of photographs of each of these girl's lives.

To challenge the viewer with a more complex reading of the project’s images, the juxtaposition of text creates a voice for the image and in doing so, a voice for each subject. If the viewer may feel they can identify and interpret the image purely along their own memory lines they are restricted from doing so due to the inclusion of quotes from each of the girls taken over the six year period of this project.
In a similar way, Albert Chong used his images to recreate a structured world around an old photograph of family members. He employed text and items significant to the subjects, to direct the viewer's attention to the subjects within a desired context. He did not trust that the viewer will read the image "correctly" as Chong wished the images to be remembered and associated. (Chong, 1999)

Light jet and Ink jet print, dimensions variable
Artist's own collection, Boulder, Colorado

It is impossible to include every episode and moment of a person's life in a photographic album, so the photographic album, like memory itself, is usually resurrected or created generically by events, such as birthdays, summer holidays, commencing school, first car, or high school graduation. (Miller, 1999) The photographs rely on our memory to interpret the details of each picture, not just of the human subjects, but their surrounds and any props within the image. Miller (1999) admits that when viewing photographs from another person's album, she cannot help but import meaning from her own childhood into the images. This is precisely what Chong strove to avoid. In his words, he did not want "white civilization", to reflect their own past onto an image of his family's culture. He feared that white civilization would identify or reflect their own past on a completely unrelated image in which Chong felt that the cultural heritage of his own ancestors could be lost. (Chong, 1999) This returns to Hirsch's
argument about the difficulties and dangers in cultural memory and familial interpretation of images.

Within my own project the act of the photographer’s gaze, and artistic license over how the images have been selected and associated with text, unites each of the twelve girls in this documentary. It also divides them from one another through the examination of each image and story. A central point of this project was to explore differences, and to point out that each girl is vastly different from the others, as was her transition from teenager to adulthood. Over the six years the relationship between myself and some of the girls became less formal in the sense that they felt or appeared through the photographs to be more comfortable with the act of being photographed. Others never lost the rigid facade of a stranger being photographed by a stranger. The text may in some cases reveal their attitudes, but it may also provide a contradictory message that prompts a discourse between the viewer and the image.

The project images were selected to create a narrative similar to the time line of a family photo album. Such a narrative highlights the subtle changes that occur in each of the girl’s lives as made evident through the photographs. The sporadic jumping from one “event” to the next creates a similar position to that of the distant relative who may only see their niece, nephew or cousin once or twice a year. It also creates an example of episodic memory and how we employ this when remembering our past. (Baddeley, 1999) Episodic memory involves remembering certain events within our life, either monumental or trivial, to recall stages in our own history. (Baddeley, 1999) Episodic memory can be referred to in many ways. Annette Kuhn (2002) chooses to call it “memory texts” and describes how her own memory texts are prompted by images both private in the form of family photographs, and public in the form of newspaper articles and images and films. Similar to Baddeley’s description of how the recall of such memory is formed, Kuhn (2002) describes it as having a great deal in common
with forms of inquiry, searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions and patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence.

Roland Barthes (1981) originally suggested that the photograph mechanically makes infinite something that only occurred once and cannot be repeated. Further the photograph cannot lead the viewer somewhere else, it always leads back to the subject. Langford (2001) argued that this definitive description of an image can place disproportionate meanings on a photographed scene. Langford (2001) likened the reading of a photograph to dropping a stone in a pond. A photograph presents ever-expanding inclusions, occlusions and allusions, and each of these change with each viewers' interpretation of an image.

Barthes eventually changed his interpretation of reading a photograph, acknowledging that a personal reading of an image may not interpret every signifier offered within a photograph and indeed that not every shown element in a photograph was important or had double meaning. The photograph is a document in which a complex exchange of looks and gazes is reflected and can be read by the subject, the viewer and the photographer. (Burgin, 1982) Susan Sontag (1977) pointed out that more than just the photograph itself needs to be considered and questioned. The viewers themselves are as much a part of a photograph and how it is interpreted, as is the photographer. The definition of a photograph and how it is interpreted cannot be easily categorised and nor would this likely be the intention of any photographer. Different ways of viewing an image are surely partly what makes the photograph an endless canvas from which as many stories can be read as there are people who view the photograph. Each person brings their own emotional and historical baggage, their own experience, to the reading and understanding of an image. A person looking at a photograph of the Eiffel Tower, regardless of whether they have been to Paris, France, will probably know what that tower is. They draw on memory texts either public or personal in order to identify and understand a scene.
Memory texts and episodic memory create a narrative from which we can piece together moments of a life history to create a story. Not only through a collection of images, but often within just one photograph, a narrative can be read and interpreted, and to some, is a vital ingredient to making a photograph understood.

Lucy Soutter (1999) in her essay titled, *Dial "P" for Panties: Narrative Photography in the 1990’s* focused on a style of photography Soutter labeled "panty photography". Her article focused largely, but not exclusively on an exhibition held at Lawrence Rubin & Greenberg Van Doren Fine Art in New York City, in the United States in 1999, called *Another Girl, Another Planet* and the prevalence of photographs of female adults and teenagers in their underwear. Indeed the inclusion of artists who have turned their cameras on this intimate style as Soutter (1999) calls it, extend well beyond the artists just within that exhibition. According to Soutter, the ‘panty photography’ style is one that presents a suggestive moment, and she questioned the role and the definition of narrative photography within her written piece. Further to her question surrounding narrative photography and it’s role within modern photography, Soutter’s article went on to suggest that narrative photography is caught in a state of permanent suspense vis a vis events that have just happened or are about to take place and photographs contain essential seeds of narratives that can never come to fruition except in the imagination. The style of photography Soutter identified, and the transitional moment in certain artist’s work where the subject appears to be caught in mid-action, creates a narrative uncertainty in comparison to other photographs in the exhibition, in that the style perhaps relies more heavily on the viewer to discover the narrative. Panty photography, where the subject is captured amid the banality of the home front but is also edged with a sexual suggestiveness, may not complete a narrative story. Is the narrative behind the image driven by the photographer or the subject? Perhaps this is what the risk is, that the sexual suggestiveness is too open for interpretation and in a context more closely aligned with soft pornography than with the art world.
Soutter almost suggested that this subject matter was a form of self promotion on behalf of the photographer, that the overt sexuality and confrontational approach cannot be ignored. (refer to Plates 6 and 7 in Chapter Two)
Each artwork is likely to have different meanings for different people as pointed out by Sontag (1987). Surely the purpose of many artists, certainly myself, is to offer a dialogue within my images that enables the viewer to connect and hold a discourse with the image and it's subject either on a personal or public platform.
The images may stir a very private, secret thought or they may prompt the viewer to shout in disagreement, but either way they have prompted a response and connection which will hopefully resonate at a later stage and be stored within the "memory texts" to resurface.

I argue here that the style to which Soutter is referring, one that can straddle the fine art/soft pornographic divide, is merely another style latched on to by the current wave of photography, and given the year of publication of her article, a style that may well have now passed. There are fads in every artistic medium throughout art history, from the Renaissance period, Art Nouveau, Abstract art to Post Modernism. These are all boxes in which to safely slot changes and identifiable styles within the art world. The history of photography may be seen as a progression of styles from early photography that attempted to emulate painting, to social and street photography of the early 20th century, to advertising and marketing inspired artwork of the 1980s. With each style of photography or art form, the viewer needs to be educated in what they are viewing and how they are interpreting it. By putting "panty photography" as Soutter described it, in an art gallery, it is immediately removed from soft pornography and placed within a public context in which the viewer would be not be welcome to masturbate in front of it. This is merely informing and educating the public that what they are looking at is the current form of photographic style.

The main photographers Soutter (1999) analyses in her essay are predominantly female. Their choice to photograph other women or use themselves in their
imagery is, as Soutter reminds us, not a new concept. Pushing the boundaries of visual aesthetics within photography began much earlier. Jo Spence's recreation of her childhood through staged photographic re-enactments allows the artist a form of personal therapy, one that Spence admitted was useful for her own understanding of her childhood. Spence stood out in her work by being confrontational. Her work pre-dates the later over-use of the young female body by advertisers such that now the naked or semi-naked body in photography no longer has the impact that Spence's work had. It is also perhaps why Soutter feels the need to discuss new work in its context to pornography.

Plate 2: Jo Spence, David Roberts
*Not Our Class*, (1989)
C-print, dimensions variable, Jo Spence Memorial Archive

Spence's work was new for it's time and allowed the female artist a voice that could not be ignored due to its deeply personal nature. Photographing her own history through her own interpretation of how it had evolved, forced the viewer to also become a part of that world, and enter the life of Spence as she put all of her fears, hopes, happiness and sadness onto the public stage. (Wells, 2004)

An artist can completely ignore social guidelines and structures and some may intentionally try to dissemble certain structures that conform to society's belief systems. For example, the aim of this project was to show through photography, that within our society, undertaking adult roles as defined by research, does not
necessarily make an adult.

Within Australia, the concept of becoming adult has been defined by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in the following formula (Sweet, 1998): finding work, completing initial education, leaving the parental home, setting up new living arrangements and forming stable personal relationships outside the family. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum researched the Australian transitional trends of youth to adulthood over a forty-year period and acknowledged that young people face several hurdles in their efforts to become adults. Sweet also identified that finding stable employment markedly improved the chances of youth achieving the other transitions to adulthood.

This research project started in 2002 when I began to document the ongoing lives of twelve female high school students, living in Melbourne, Australia. Throughout the six years of the project none of the girls dwelt on achieving any of the steps identified in the above research. By the conclusion of the project, not one of the girls had achieved all the milestones outlined by Sweet, but all believed they had made the transition from being a teenager to being an adult. The ongoing audio interviews conducted with each of the girls allowed them to discuss positive and negative influences, peer group pressure, family dramas and expectations, as well as giving them a voice and a chance to express and reveal their fears and hopes for the future.

From 1992 to 2002, the University of Melbourne conducted a Life-Patterns Research Project spanning ten years, which looked at the transition from youth to adulthood. The head researcher, Professor Johanna Wyn (2004), concluded that the transition period from youth to adulthood had to be redefined, as it had changed so much from the mid 1900s. Wyn (2004) argued that due to a rapidly changing world, we should redefine how we perceive the transitions of youths to adults, and though I generally agree with her, I don't think we should ignore the historical and cultural ties of individual family groups. On a project as large as the
Life-Patterns Research Project, which surveyed 2000 individuals, I don't believe it is possible to gain a close insight into the lives and characters of the subjects. However on a scale of twelve girls, where a personal connection can be formed, it is easier to see where and how possible changes have taken place, especially when each girl can identify a moment of change or self-realisation in their own lives and ways of dealing with growing up. To create stereotypes or ideas relating to the social progression of a group of youths, creates what is ultimately too broad a generalisation, similar in fact to the descriptions of age groups that fall within the Generations of X, Y and Z. Individuality is the key to discovering oneself and transgressing from one age group to the next. (Markello, 2005)

In the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services of Australia research paper, *Youth in Focus: Interaction between educational participation, educational attainment and labour force activity*, the focus is on contemporary patterns of transition and reflects how we understand these patterns. It suggests that it may be time to rethink "normal" transitions for young people in Australia, and to discard outmoded assumptions about the relationships between education and work that were generated in a different social era. (Pawagi, V. 2002) Terms such as "generation on hold" and "arrested adulthood" have been used to describe young Canadians' transitions. (Cote, 2000) In the United Kingdom, the term "post-adolescence" has been used. In the Netherlands, the term "over-aged young adults" is proposed, and in Australia "extended transitions" is a common term. (Dwyer and Wyn 2001)

I suggest that these descriptions make an assumption that young people's transitions are faulty. These characterisations are reminiscent of traditional views of youth as "incomplete", for which the only cure is "adulthood". (Wyn and White, 1997) Perhaps the fault here is the perennial problem of a previous generation not coming to terms with how the following generation is doing things. The difference in values between each of the oft labeled generations, baby boomers, generation X-ers and generation Y-ers, marks that change is taking place much
faster between groups of young adults than ever before. The patterns are perhaps too fast to keep up with, but instead of going with the flow, the tendency is that patterns have to be researched and analysed.

Sweet's (1998) emphasis on finding stable employment to complete the transition from teenager to adulthood has become an outmoded notion of what it means to become an adult. Prior to the 1970s most young people would have entered the work force on a full time basis straight from school. Today the transition to full-time work is much more gradual and drawn out. Most young people will not find full-time employment until they are well into their twenties, will have a post-school qualification, and will have been exposed to the work force through part-time employment and often through university degrees that include work placement while studying. (Wooden, 1998)

Becoming an adult involves a series of choices that are made in relation to one another, as well as in relation to the choices of other people. The decision to enter the workforce, for example, interacts with other dimensions of the transition to adulthood: it can require departure from school and may enable a young person to leave his or her parents household. Peers move together through these linked decisions, young people take note of each other’s movements along multiple dimensions, and their decisions and paths impact on one another. (Stranger-Ross et. al, 2005) Stranger-Ross also identified that since the 1970s the following generation of young adults were the first 20th Century generation to make decisions about marriage and establishing procreative households in positions of relative autonomy from their parents (2005). By the end of the 20th century youth were identified as having to find the answers to life, and how to apply them to their own journey using their own devices (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1999), rather than being dictated to by convention and tradition. The collection of personal data from each of the twelve girls within this project, and its comparison to social research into the transition from teenager to adulthood, creates a mosaic of conflicting arguments. The research surrounding
this theme appears to create stereotypes that not everyone can easily fit in to. This form of stereotyping creates huge gaps, which then need to be analysed and assessed, usually by generations not currently experiencing the life changes they are reporting or analysing. It appears to me to be a massive oversight that the most simple and personal nature involved in life changes, being personal experience, has been overlooked and not significantly incorporated in to research data.
Chapter Two

Many of the artists discussed within this chapter utilise documentary modes within their artistic practice and exploit a number of narrative devices. Creating a narrative within photographs is an arguably difficult process often resulting in the misinterpretation of an image. Some of these artists employ various tools, like the accompaniment of text or montage to direct the narrative or meaning of an image. Other photographs over time have been strong enough to represent iconic moments in history due only to the composition and subject matter.

In the 1930s, the U.S. Government's Farm Security Association (FSA) commissioned a group of photographers including Dorothea Lange to document the FSA's goal to improve the life of farmer's who had suffered financially during the Depression. Lange's work for this project highlighted the darker side of the outcomes of the FSA, with her photographs depicting extreme rural poverty as she turned her camera on outcast, homeless farmers and their families. Although this focus was not the intention of the FSA's photographic goal, it does say much about the subjective inevitability of documentary photography.

Lange's images have become synonymous with this period of American History. (Gordon, 2006) Her process of creating a documentary included long informative captions for her photographs. Lange did this to not only comply with the FSA orders to provide a detailed account of what was photographed, but also as an attempt to control the meanings of her pictures. Lange rejected the picture-is-worth-a-thousand-words idea and believed instead that documentary photographs usually remained ambiguous if not accompanied by words. She was attempting to connect personal experience with vast historical processes, to create photographic microhistorics. Her use of captions, both to delimit and to expand the meaning of her photographs, paralleled her labour to control the images themselves, not only by cropping and framing, as all photographers do,
but also by asking subjects to move, coaxing them to be animated through conversation, and incorporating detail to communicate social context. (Gordon, 2006)

The association of text with imagery in that situation allows the viewer to read beyond the picture and smell the smells, hear the noises or silence, and step into the life of the photographer. It can be argued that the text can often dramatise the contents of the image. Text can certainly dictate how a reader perceives the subject matter in the photograph. The purpose of presenting the following same three images with different text is to highlight the way in which text can define an image and change the context of the visual information.

“Oh no, the cattle have jumped the paddock again.....”

"If you die, you're dead – that's all."

Plate 3: Dorothea Lange, *Woman of the High Plains, Texas Panhandle*, (1938)
Gelatin silver photograph, 49.4 x 39.3cm. National Gallery of Victoria.

"Those crazy kids, always playing practical jokes."

Plate 3: Dorothea Lange, *Woman of the High Plains, Texas Panhandle*, (1938)
Gelatin silver photograph, 49.4 x 39.3cm. National Gallery of Victoria.

The above example of Nettie Featherton, photographed by Lange for the FSA
was published with the caption, "If you die, you're dead - that's all." The purpose of including these examples is to question how we read an image. Lange's highly recognised images focus on a social element and have a resonated impact on American culture. By applying familial gazing on her photographs, certain elements of our knowledge of history can be applied to the subject and empathy can be employed to help read and understand the narrative of the image. (Hirsch, 1999) The inclusion of text can manipulate meaning within an image and confuse the narrative.

It can be argued that the documentary photographer represents as much as they can, a truth with as little manipulation as possible. But the moment a photographer picks up a camera and begins to frame a shot, they are altering reality by placing their own visual interpretation on what they see through the camera lens. The family snapshot, regardless of the era it was photographed, can be associated with any person's history through familial memory. (Hirsch, 1999) As mentioned in Chapter One, the danger of this is that the intention of the artist can be lost if the viewer is projecting their own past and personal associations on the image. As Soutter (1999) points out, a lack of narrative in photography opens up a Pandora's box of possibilities in terms of how the image could be interpreted.

Using a large format camera set on a tripod, the American photographer, Tina Barney documented her close and extended family over a period of decades, usually in their home environment. The transition of Barney's family and friends creates a true-life story of the subjects within the frame and also echoes the transition of the photographer who appears often in the portraits. Even when Barney is not visible her presence is felt in the familiar stares and actions of her subjects. She is as much part of the narrative as are her subjects.
Ektacolor print, 30x40 inches,
University of Virginia Art Museum, Virginia

Chromogenic Print, 30 x 40 inches,
Gallery 339 Fine Art Photography, Philadelphia

Barney’s development of a personal style, and a desire as a photographer to offer the viewer different amounts of information, can be seen through the
transition of her photographs and her subjects. (Greene, 2005) Barney initially photographed family members with the intention of including personal information within the frame of the photograph. Her style changed over time to focus directly on the subjects with lesser note to their personal surroundings.

Bringing documentary photography on to the domestic front can create a sense of confusion for the viewer, confusion surrounding the relationship between the subject and the photographer. Photography in a domestic setting immediately implies that the photographer has been invited into a person’s home and that the subject is willing to reveal a personal element of their lives. Within each photograph’s narrative it can be argued that the viewer may feel more at ease with specific information that links the photographer with the subject, and therefore releases the viewer from any incriminating relationship by being drawn in to a provocative discourse with the subject.

Grannan’s collection of work titled, *The Poughkeepsie Journal*, is a series of portraits, usually of teenage girls. The girls are photographed in their homes and are mostly either naked or semi-nude. The age of Grannan’s subjects, and the positions they are photographed in, imply that a personal connection *should* exist with the photographer. It is unclear from researching Grannan’s work what dialogue was exchanged between herself and her subjects, other than her recruiting method. She advertised through the local newspaper for models with no experience. Did Grannan ask her subjects to undress or was that the choice and desire of her sitters? Grannan is one of the artists questioned by Soutter, as mentioned in Chapter One, who grapples with the same dilemma, and possibly has a similar amount of unrest in viewing Grannan’s work as I do. One cannot help but question what just happened or what is happening between the photographer and the subject during the portrait shoot. The naked girls photographed individually are usually mid action, either talking or gesturing. Grannan’s style has enabled them to momentarily put their guard down by engaging them through distraction while she continues shooting. Grannan’s work
reveals girls in a banal setting showing a seductiveness in being photographed. The young women appear to be making a poignant effort to achieve a kind of sexiness, glamour, or independence that might transport them, if only momentarily, from the confines of their ordinary lives. (Avgikos, 2005) Art historian, Jan Avgikos, acknowledges that Grannan has successfully dramatised the unbridgeable gap between subject and observer (2005). By removing part of the narrative, her images open up boundaries that other artists go to extreme lengths to close, in order for her viewers to be inextricably linked to an image that they could never fully understand.

C-print mounted on paper, 47 ½ x 38 inches
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Creating boundaries relating to narrative within photography is a choice the photographer can make either when they photograph the subject, or later when it comes to cropping, altering and/or presenting the images.

Within the narratives of *Girl?? I'm a woman now!*, there is a shift in photographic
styles over the six year duration of the project. At first there was the desire to capture information connected to the girls, like the contents of their bedrooms, in a similar way to Barney's, *Marina's Room* shown earlier. Towards the end of the project some of the girls felt more comfortable with the camera and were content to be photographed looking directly into the camera, without too many personal trappings around them. Like Grannan and other photographers, I engaged my subjects in conversation while photographing them to encourage them to relax and lower their guard.

Plate 7. Lise Sarfati


C-print, dimensions 30 x 20 inches, Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

Susan Sontag (1997) not only questioned the role of the photographer and their relationship to the subject they were photographing, but also the importance of the viewer’s ability to objectively digest a photograph by applying and limiting their own familial gaze to the viewed object. There is an understanding that the photographer has a connection to their subject and this creates a division in how a viewer can realistically view a subject in an unbiased form. (Sontag, 1977), (Burgin, 1982) When Soutter (1999) highlighted the problematic subject matter in the work of some of the artists exhibited in *Another Girl: Another Planet*, it can be easily seen how the problematic relationship between the photographer and their subject can be raised. In both Lise Sarfati’s documentation of teenagers and their every day movements and Katy Grannan’s documentation of female
teenagers, the personal nature of the images questions the position of the photographer, i.e. a stranger being in the close vicinity of a naked and probably underage model. Is the confrontational sexuality in these images more about the photographer or the photographed?

In the 7-Up (1964 - 2005) documentary film series, director Michael Apted films every seven years the same group of British individuals who originally took part in the first of the series forty-nine years ago. In the last film, each of the remaining participants questioned Apted's role and how he manipulated the film footage to portray his subjects as he defined them. One of the subjects, Jackie, voices her dissent at his approach and how over the years feels she has been misrepresented. Her desire to continue with the series was to allow her own voice to be heard over and above the editing of Apted. The viewer is unable to determine if the Jackie we see is how she would like us to view her, as we know the power of editing is predetermined prior to our viewing of the footage. (Apted, 2005)

In still photography, through the narrative of an image, the viewer is allowed to explore the image, find hidden detail that could evoke questions relating to the image, and speculate on what the photographer is trying to imply through the image. Documentary photographers tend to leave us with original traces of the world, whether the traces are photojournalistic witnessing of an event, or an intimate glance at the everyday. Regardless of the subject matter, their work describes that the visual ingredient of the “world” is a product of the human imagination: and a lot depends on the way you look at it. (Palmer, 2005)

The narrative device Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra uses, is to eliminate as much information from the surrounds of her subjects as possible, in order to have the audience cast their own interpretations on her images.

"....I want people to look at life in a new and different way, but it always has to be based on reality. It's important that you don’t pass judgment, but leave space for interpretation. For example, in the Almerisa series, the young Bosnian refugee,
whose portrait I took for the first time in the early 1990s, it was important for me not to show any specific details of her surroundings such as the décor of the apartment. If you show too much of a subject's personal life, the viewer will immediately make assumptions. If you leave out the details, the viewer has to look for much subtler hints such as how her shoelaces are tied, or her lipstick or the state of her hair. But for me it's all about subtlety and the fact that you really have to read the image to get clues. That makes it equal for everybody.” (Jaeger, 2007)

Dijkstra's subject is life in transition – the cusp of adulthood, or parenthood, or the start of a new job – passages through which people become themselves and in the process reveal themselves. (Kimmelmann, 2003)

Chromogenic colour prints, 13 ¾ x 11"
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Dijkstra's documentation of Almerisa, a Bosnian refugee, extending over a period of years, parallels my own in the sense that the subject is not family or a close friend and yet offers herself up to Dijkstra and her camera to be photographed once a year. Within the Almerisa study, Dijkstra created a series of images that, when viewed as a whole, create the narrative needed to understand the work and the transition of Almerisa's life. The transition Dijkstra is documenting in each situation is marked by a self-consciousness that parallels the uneasy passage between childhood and adulthood. By stripping away the components of the image, which may provide the viewer with additional information, she brings the viewer back to the core purpose and intention of the work, that is, the documentation of this girl's transition over time. Throughout the series of portraits of Almerisa, starting when she was seven years old, she initially appears as a child passively sitting on a chair, waiting. As she aged, she became a young woman wanting to engage with the camera, presenting her "front". Her self-realisation, and possible further understanding of what Dijkstra was trying to do became evident as the documentation continued.
Dijkstra's chosen subjects not only represent their own individuality but also represent a group. Her style of producing revealing human portraits aligns her with the strongly confrontational approach of Dianne Arbus from 1960s America and August Sander's documentation of German society in the 1920s.

This progression of understanding between the photographer and the photographed is mirrored in my own work. The chronological display of photographs in the project is intended to give the viewer a chance to pause and digest the visual clues and prompts, and so create their own narrative as Kuhn (2002) describes, recalling memory texts. This is often enough for photographic artists when creating a narrative within a body of work, but as Hirsch (1999) points out, the act of familial reading can often create an incorrect interpretation of an image. Tracey Moffat's choice to include text with her imagery in her body of work, *Scarred for Life* (1994), creates a barrier through which the possibility of applying familial reading is impossible to surpass. Moffat's use of text can be argued to have more resonance than the images themselves. The viewer, instead of being drawn into a familiar and comfortable feeling of connection with the image is halted by the accompanying text. The text reads like a title but is crucial to the narrative of the image and immediately restricts the viewer's interpretation of the visual. Moffat's intention was to highlight difference and shame, consistent themes within her work. She describes her work as being inspired by her own childhood memory, as well as remembering her past and her family's history. Within this aim it can be argued that Moffatt successfully disabled any act of familial referencing by the viewer, just as Chong sort to do with his montages. (Olubas, 2005)
Offset lithograph on paper, 31 1/8 x 23 1/2 inches.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Text from image: “Her father’s nickname for her was ‘useless’.”

The text used in Moffat’s *Scarred for Life* series assumes the person is reacting to the insult or action described in the text. It appears that the text has been used here as a vehicle to bring the eye back to the subject matter and possibly into the subject’s thoughts. The reaction is meant to unsettle the viewer, and Moffat successfully achieves this. The snapshots appear to be taken from a photo album but we know the images in this collection are staged. Moffatt is a fine art photographer, not a documentary photographer, we know the text is probably unassociated with the subject but possibly a captured sound bite from a conversation. The juxtaposition of the title with the image appears to be matched. It is only in retrospect that the authenticity of the quote in relation to the image is questioned.

The quotes used in *Girl??? I’m a woman now!* are taken directly from the interviews conducted with each participant. The intention was to choose quotes
that shaped and enhanced the period of time at which the photograph was taken, giving an insight into the emotional state and social viewpoint of the participant at that time, and also creating a memory that could be pinpointed as a pivotal moment in each of the girls' lives.

Plate 11: Ken Lum, *There is no place like home* (detail), 2000/2004, inkjet prints, 105x74 cm
L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht, Frankfurt, Germany

Ken Lum's series titled *No Place Like Home*, was constructed to pose the question of how each viewer wishes to identify with the text, or remove themselves from its incrimination. Each photograph of different ethnicities is juxtaposed with suggestible text. Depending on how the images are read, the text can be interchangeable between each image. Lum is giving the direction to the viewer and creating a highly political punch. His use of linguistic devices in connection with the candid portraits of people mid-sentence creates a variety of meanings and associations.

The still photograph and its record of a period in time that can never be repeated, uniquely mirrors the process of memory, which focuses on particular events, experiences and sensations. (Barthes, 1981), (Baddeley, 1999) In
comparison to the moving image where a filmed event is a continuous string of images, the still photograph allows the viewer to capture a snapshot of time.

The limits of memory mean that when we remember an event or period of our lives, we remember in moments rather than every second that occurred during that time. The moments may be happy or sad, or based on a smell or colour that jogs our memory. These moments are akin to still photographs in our minds. (Baddeley, 1999)

Freezing a moment in time through a photograph captures an expression which reveals a story. This story can be interpreted by the viewer in whatever way they choose. The way the viewer will respond to the image and the expression of the subject, relies on the memory that is evoked through the process of looking, and remembering how they felt at that age. It may have nothing to do with the subject herself, but more to do with the setting - the bedroom decoration, the clothes she is wearing, or the season of the year.

The images in this documentary project have been presented to the viewer in chronological order to chart a time-line of change in each of the twelve girls. The images are also juxtaposed with personal quotes from each of them, capturing their own impressions and preoccupations at specific times. The process of linking specific quotes and pictures has been an artistic one in which I have sought to locate new potential meanings and associations much like the way metaphor operates in poetry.

Throughout this chapter I have explored documentary photo practice and the role of narrative through visual imagery and narrative through the juxtaposition of text and image. The viewer is given the opportunity to apply their own meanings and associations to the narrative within an image. There are photographers and artists who do not wish to do this, who employ a range of methods to create a barrier that distances and restricts the viewer from having too much power over
how they interpret the image. To tell a story as an artist is a very powerful tool and one that is not necessarily easy to achieve. An image can give conflicting signals, like the photography Soutter criticises, but it can, within that conflict, allow the viewer to question themselves, and their own experiences in order to better understand what they are viewing.

This was my primary reason for including text with each of the images. The intention was not merely to exhibit dozens of photographs of girls taken over a few years. It was to tighten the chord around their stories, to place their stories and photographs within a context that relates to their own experiences during this time, and in doing so, subvert the possibility of the viewer, a stranger, placing their own assumptions on what life means to these girls, just as one may view a family photo album and mentally connect one photographed event to the next.
Chapter Three – The Process

The process of documenting a group of strangers over a six year period was a difficult and often frustrating but ultimately a rewarding experience. This chapter describes the methodology of the project, and the hurdles encountered while trying to keep track of twelve young women. Their individual progression from teenager to adult and the individual traits of each girl which determined how my own relationship with each of them progressed, is summarised within this chapter.

In 2002, I set out to find a group of individual, diverse girls in their final year of secondary school in order to engage them in a photographic documentary that would follow their transition from teenagers to adulthood over a six year period. The initial concept for the project was to recruit as many girls from as many cultural and ethnic backgrounds across Melbourne as possible. The most effective way to do this was through the Department of Education, which provided a letter of authority to approach secondary schools within Melbourne. The schools I approached were selected on their demographic location in the hope of recruiting as diverse a range of students as possible.

In the final year of secondary school in Australia, most teenagers are either seventeen or eighteen years of age. For the purposes of this project, parental permission had to be provided, primarily to allow underage girls to participate, but also for the family to acknowledge that they too would be a part of the documentary process. The intention of this project was to avoid intentionally including girls who may have fitted in to a category based on their socio-economic status or the likelihood of any one of them becoming “at risk”.

There were thirteen definite responses to participate in the research and over the period from 2002 to 2008, only one girl, Angie, dropped out. This was due to the difficulties in keeping in contact.
The initial steps of the project involved a group discussion at a secondary school at which information packs relating to the project were distributed. It was then up to individuals to make contact if they were interested in taking part. When contact was made by telephone, I was unaware of who the girls were until I turned up at their homes for the initial interview. Privacy laws and University Ethics regulations restricted me from taking names and contact details when I first met them at their respective schools. The only knowledge I had of them prior to meeting them was the school they attended, which was no indication of their social demographic or cultural background. At this early stage, the initial idea for the project, to engage as many cultural backgrounds as possible, had to shift dramatically, in order to adapt to those girls who agreed to be a part of the documentary.

Considering the transition points that established research determines is the time a teenager becomes an adult, the following brief summaries of each of the girls describe where they are in relation to the five points of transition: finding work, completing initial education, leaving the parental home, setting up new living arrangements and forming stable personal relationships outside the family. I have also included what I believe to be the most important element of their transitional period, and that is their own identified period of self-realisation.

**Alex**

Alex went to a public secondary school in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. When we met, she was living with her family in a northern suburb. Her bedroom in the family house, was a converted shop front. Her parents are Italian, and she has two younger sisters and an older brother. Alex has now moved out of home and lives in a share house with two other people in the same suburb as her parents. At first she returned home regularly for meals and domestic chores but has gradually reduced her visits. Over the period of the project Alex had not finished any course she had undertaken in higher education.
and had not maintained the same job for any longer than eight months. The interviews with Alex would often last for hours. Alex would divulge her activities and hopes and inspirations in a continuous stream of dialogue where one story became interwoven with several others. In 2008 she enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts, Music Industry and is currently studying full time. Up until 2008 she received government financial support as she looked for work. Over the six years Alex was involved in a number of personal relationships lasting from one month to one year. Despite her opinion of her parents, which changed each time we met, Alex has received ongoing emotional support from her family, especially her father, as well as her friends. She appeared to need strong peer support, but constantly felt betrayed either by family or friends. Alex considers that there have been a few identifiable moments where she had developed self-realisation and a sense of moving into adulthood. One of these was the decision to budget her laundry expenses into her outgoings, and not depend so much on the family for her weekly washing. Another was when her two best friends had become young mothers, and no longer had time to emotionally support her. This forced her to re-evaluate her situation, and reflect on what she was doing with her life. Alex appeared to live life as though she were on a roller coaster. There were many ups and downs in her story, and huge emotional shifts from euphoria to misery throughout some interviews. I felt our relationship was very open. Alex had a high degree of trust from the first time I met her and was not reserved in any of our meetings. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Alex, see Appendix A, pp.ii-xii)

Amanda

Amanda attended an exclusive public girls secondary school in the inner suburbs of Melbourne where entry is based on the attendants sitting an entrance examination. She worked part-time prior to leaving school, and lived with her family in the outer suburbs of south-east Melbourne. Her parents are Malaysian, and she has an older brother and a younger sister. Amanda entered university education in the year following school and has since completed her Bachelor of
Arts - Media and Communications with a major in Chinese. Her father had a huge impact on the subjects and degree she would study, going as far as choosing her subjects, submitting her application, and forging her signature, while she was holidaying in Asia. A regular theme of discussion in our interviews was how unhappy she was in the Media Communications degree course that her father had chosen for her, and his pressure for her to also study Commerce. From her first year of university, Amanda expressed an interest in studying Chinese but it was not until two years later that she enrolled in a Chinese subject and abandoned the idea of studying Commerce.

Amanda became involved in a self-awareness program called Landmark which she cites as having a positive impact on her life at that time. Her relationship with her family became strained when she began to disagree with their cultural values, prompting her to move in with her boyfriend, Alex, and his family. In her last year of university, Amanda went to China to complete her degree. She ended the relationship with her boyfriend and remained in China to work. She met her German husband in China, during which time she had a failed pregnancy. She is now living permanently with him in Germany, studying German and working part-time as an English Language Trainer and Marketing and Events Co-ordinator. Interestingly, in retrospect, Amanda considers her parents and brother to have given her the most emotional support over the past six years. She pinpoints the time she realised that she was an independent young adult to when she completed her degree in China, when her fellow students and friends left Shanghai to return to their respective countries. She felt very much alone, but also realised that she could support herself financially and emotionally. Amanda always seemed very focused either with short term goals and then later with long term goals, there was always a 'plan'. Her response to being interviewed was open and direct. I believe Amanda grasped the concept of the project and revealed very personal information as she saw that it would benefit the documentary. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Amanda, see Appendix A, pp.xiii-xxiii)
Danya

Danya attended a private Jewish secondary school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and lived with her parents and two younger sisters until her second year of university when she moved out and shared a flat with a friend. In the year after finishing school, she went to Israel for three months as part of a Jewish youth movement, to work on a kibbutz and take part in Jewish youth studies. The purpose of the trip was to learn leadership values to then teach to Jewish youth groups in Melbourne upon her return. Danya worked at number of part time jobs to support herself through university, from waitressing, to administration work for the university, also tutoring a politics subject and teaching a Sunday school class at a progressive Jewish synagogue. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and then continued to do a Masters in Public Policy and Management.

Danya was in a serious relationship for three years but has since broken up with her boyfriend Aidan under what she described as difficult terms. During the time of the documentary Danya relied on her family for emotional support but also highly respected the support from her friends and boyfriend. Over the course of the project I felt Danya became less willing to be involved in the documentary. Although she still agreed to meet, it appeared to me that she wanted the project to end. I believe she was guarded during our meetings and was very conscious of giving measured and thought out answers rather than chatting freely and openly as some of the girls felt they could. When Danya turned twenty-one, we were due to meet and she constantly deferred our meeting time, when we did eventually meet she apologised that she had been too busy organising her twenty first Birthday party, but had failed to tell me, although this would have been a perfect time to photograph her. I didn’t question this when we met again as I was very conscious of keeping a peaceful relationship with each of the girls and very aware that if I ever overstepped the mark, they could drop out without notice.
Danya identified her period of transition or self-realisation as being when she moved out of home and felt she no longer had to be accountable to anyone over what time she would be home or what she was doing in her spare time. She confessed her tie with her family is very deep but feels that living further away from them geographically has helped her feel more independent. Danya really experienced self-realisation after looking for work when she realised she had a range of skills that made her valuable to organisations, rather than just being qualified to work at bottom-rung and temporary jobs. In mid 2008, Danya left Australia for a five month development placement in Mongolia with an organisation called Women for Social Progress, working on democratic awareness training packages. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Danya, see Appendix A, pp.xxiv-xxx)

Eleanor

Eleanor attended the same selective public school as Amanda and Priyanka, that required an entrance examination for all attendees. At the closure of the project Eleanor was in her final year of university education studying a degree in Architecture. She intends to work full time when she finishes university and in 2008 was offered a job as a sustainability consultant with the Architectural and Engineering firm SKM. Eleanor worked part time during university, living with her separated parents and alternating between the two, while studying. She moved out of her father’s house towards the end of this project (2008) and is currently living in share accommodation with a number of other students.

Eleanor’s mother is English and her father Australian. She has one younger and one older brother. Her father suffers chronic fatigue syndrome and Eleanor felt it was too much stress for her to cope with during her last year of university. She had a serious relationship for approximately three years, which ended when she went overseas to complete six months of her degree at a university in Sweden. She is currently in a new relationship with another student called James who she knew from her early years of high school. Eleanor struggled with the notion of
being mature. She stated that she felt she hadn't really grown up at all, but identified that during her period of traveling prior to study in Sweden she encountered a number of set-backs which she had to deal with on her own. This experience made her realise how capable she was if she trusted her own abilities. Eleanor had been visiting a therapist prior to going overseas. She felt she didn't need that help when she returned. Her purpose of seeing the therapist came from a depressive state brought on by the stress of university. This was a regular theme during our interviews, the fear that she wasn't good enough, and the constant reminder from peers and industry contacts that architects don't make any money. She also cited that her parent's break up contributed to an anger that she felt she had harboured for a number of years due to the perceived emotional pressure she felt was placed on her by her parents when she was too young to fully comprehend it. Eleanor requested that I not divulge this information through the text excerpts that accompanied her photographs as she thought it would upset her parents, which reveals the degree of trust she placed in me. Eleanor is extremely focused but appeared to suffer from extreme uncertainty with any choice she had to make. It is no surprise to me that despite her constant distress at not doing well enough at university, she earnt entrance to the Masters year and landed a job in the direction of her dream. Eleanor cites her dad as being a hugely positive influence and emotional pillar for her during university. She addressed her self-esteem issues in the last interview, believing that she had not contributed to the project, and worrying that the other girls would outshine her. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Eleanor, see Appendix A, pp.xxxii-xliv)

Erin

Erin was living in student accommodation in inner Melbourne at the beginning of this project. She attended the same public high school as Alex and Nisa in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. Over the six years of this project, she has lived in a series of share houses, changing address approximately once a year. Erin has changed jobs every six months but supports herself financially. She has
had a series of de facto relationships, and is currently living with her boyfriend Steve, whom she considers to be her future husband. She left secondary school a few weeks prior to final exams, and did not complete her final year. Erin had been accepted into a Horse Management Course in rural Victoria which she began a year after the final year of high school. She returned to Melbourne to work for an international horse transport company, and did not finish the course. She is actively involved in the horse industry, owning thirteen horses around Victoria. Her mother has lived in Queensland ever since Erin was fifteen. In 2006 Erin was the victim of a car accident, which left her in rehabilitation for a period of at least six months. It was during rehabilitation, that she had time to think about her future and question her independence, and her place within the world. Erin believes that this was a turning point. Her maturity and self-realisation was activated by the life threatening consequences of the accident, which ironically, left her completely financially dependent on her boyfriend, Steve. Having since recovered 80%, she has returned to riding her horses at competition level, even though she was told that she would never be able to ride again. Her work environment still changes on average every six months, and she is currently working for an international pet transportation company.

Erin was one of the most frustrating girls to keep in contact with as she moved house every six months to a year, with very little notice. I had made preparations to travel to the country to visit her over two days, the day before I was due to leave she had disappeared without notice. Having said that, Erin was very shy but still enjoyed being brought in to conversation. Our meetings would start as formal questions but her degree of trust would increase during the time we spent together and she would tell me more without any prompting, revealing her hopes and how she felt about her own life and the path she had taken. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Erin, see Appendix A, pp.xlv-lii)

Feven

Feven migrated from Ethiopia with her mum and sister in 1996, and went to a
public secondary school in the western suburbs of Melbourne, with Linda, who was also involved in this project. Feven completed her Degree in Telecommunications Engineering and is now working full time in a graduate placement program for a smelting company in Port Pirie, South Australia. Her mother worked in a similar field prior to coming to Australia. While at school and university, Feven was supported financially by her mother, who also performed all housekeeping and cooking duties. When Feven left home she had never cooked for herself, but had learnt from watching her mother. Feven and her family are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Religion plays a major part in their lives, and Feven returns to Melbourne to celebrate religious festivals with her family.

My relationship with Feven never progressed beyond the polite stranger routine. I don’t believe Feven fully grasped the concept of the project and there were times when she would choose a meeting place that was removed from her personal life. One example of controlling the photographic environment was when I met her at her family’s apartment shortly before Christmas one year. During this time each year her mother would take away a luxury item for a period of weeks as a sacrifice leading up to Christmas, this particular year, it was her bed. Feven and her sister were sleeping on the floor during this time but Feven refused to let me see her room even though it was metres away from where we were sitting conducting the interview. I asked many times in various ways but it became uncomfortable and I had to accept her denial. I still feel that I never captured the real Feven. There was always a front that I believe she presented to me. She considered her mother and sister her only source of emotional support. Feven’s mother did not allow her to work during her university years, and she was not allowed to have a boyfriend until she had completed her degree. Social outings usually involved her sister, and her mother was strict about where she went, and what time she returned home. Feven is currently living with a male house-mate in Port Pirie and she has never entered any form of relationship. She would like to meet a man of the Orthodox Christian faith when
she returns to Melbourne and will hopefully get married, "to keep her mum happy". Feven at first cited the difference between high school and university as a significant changing point in her life and what was expected of her, but later cited her move interstate and having to cook and clean for herself as the turning point of her transition process. Feven still talks to her mum and sister three times a day and they are still very much her source of emotional support. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Feven, see Appendix A, pp.liii-lviii)

**Katie**

Katie attended a private school in South Melbourne after moving from a small Jewish school where she felt she didn’t belong. She still lives at home with her parents, and has an older, independent brother. She worked part-time in a home furnishings store during university, but still received financial support from her parents. The year after her final year of secondary school, Katie went to Israel as part of a Jewish Youth group with Danya, to work on a kibbutz on the Gaza Strip and learn leadership values, with the intention of leading Jewish youth groups on her return to Melbourne. After returning from Israel, she began university studies, doing a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a double major in Anthropology and Film Studies. Her inspiration for studying both of these majors came from buying a book on anthropology at a market when she was in Year 11 at high school. She has lived on and off with her parents over the six years of the project. When she was living in share accommodation it was in an apartment owned by her parents.

Katie has had one serious relationship that ended in 2006. Her emotional support comes from her family and friends. She identified that her transition point in the growing up process was her six month trip to Israel. Breaking up with her boyfriend and recognising that she was an independent person with views and goals of her own, was another key time in developing maturity. Up until their break-up, she felt that she had been living through her boyfriend, and not living
for herself. Katie felt that she had always put people up on pedestals for reasons of beauty or skills or popularity, and she constantly judged herself in comparison to those she idolised. She wanted to travel overseas again but hated the idea of having to ask her parents for money. Her periods of travel give her a sense of free-ness as she describes it.

After leaving school, she worked for her uncle producing a television program, and worked in a store, where her father was the company’s lawyer. Katie admits that she still struggles with the ties she has with her family but knows she needs them to sustain her present living conditions and goals. Her participation in this documentary is interesting in that considering her interest in film and television and sociological documentaries she was a very unwilling participant. There is a very large gap between one meeting with Katie and the final interview. Katie admitted she felt very guilty about becoming un-contactable. Given her own interests in both photography and documentaries, she admitted she would hate for a subject participant to do to her what she had done to me. My last contact with Katie was via Facebook in which she informed me she was now living in Israel. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Katie, see Appendix A, pp.lx-lix-lxvi)

Linda

Linda attended a public high school in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Linda and her family are East Timorese refugees. She lives with her family of twelve in an outer suburb of north-western Melbourne. When Linda first started attending higher education she was limited to what she could apply for due to her family’s asylum status. If she wanted to attend university she would have had to enroll as a full fee paying international student, as her family, at that time had not been granted citizenship. She initially started a graduate Certificate in Pathology at a TAFE but later dropped out and after her family received citizenship in 2005, enrolled in university and completed a Marketing Degree. Her family inspired her
to continue studying and she is currently enrolled full time in an International Business Degree and has been offered a scholarship to travel to China for three months in 2009 as part of her degree.

Linda has worked either part time or full time all the way through high school and during the six years of this project. She likens her family home to a share house, where everyone pays their own way, and contributes money towards the living expenses. Her family were given asylum status as East Timorese citizens but were not granted citizenship until 2005. Linda has had one relationship which she considered to be not very serious, but is currently single and her extensive family provide most of her emotional support. Linda is one of the only two girls in the project who ever contacted me when an event was occurring in her life. Her extended family would often hold huge parties to which hundreds of people would attend. They were very inviting, allowing me to photograph them in their house regardless of what state of dress they were in whenever I visited. I believe Linda regarded me formally as she would often appear embarrassed and I suspect she monitored her responses to me during our interviews, which never progressed beyond the polite question and answer sessions. She identified the time when she was a team leader at her job in a bistro at Crown Casino, as being a time when she felt she was accountable for other people and her own life. She was able to recognise that she was developing a sense of self-realisation and taking positive steps to follow the direction she wanted in her life. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Linda, see Appendix A, pp.lxvii-lxxi)

**Nisa**

Nisa attended a public secondary school in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. Nisa lived with her mother above a restaurant. Her parents are both Australian, and separated when she was six years old, but she maintains a strong connection with her father, who lives in Perth, Western Australia. Shortly after completing school, Nisa moved in with her boyfriend, Frank, and his mother.
During the five years of the project she has returned to live with her mother a number of times between living in share houses. She enrolled in a higher education course in childcare but did not complete the course, opting for fulltime work in the child care industry. She aims to return to further education within the next year (2008/2009). She had financially supported herself in both part-time and full-time employment since the end of school and at the end of the project was working part-time as a child care worker and a cattery assistant.

Nisa has had five relationships during the project, lasting anywhere between a month to one and half years. In 2008 she had been in a relationship for four months. Nisa was unable to identify a specific point in time where she felt she had grown up, but felt she had "come along way since high school". She had dreams of becoming a writer and had made a significant amount of progress on a young teenage book before she left high school. Boyfriends and the need to make money prevented her from continuing. Nisa’s mother was diagnosed with breast cancer part way through the project. This gave Nisa a reality check, and made her focus on and appreciate the emotional support her mother gives her. She identifies her mum as her main provider of emotional support and regards her as being her equal.

Nisa was the other girl in the project who did make contact with me when moments of transition or an event were happening in her life. My relationship with her would be the closest of all the twelve girls due to the personal connection I have with her mother, and also because she became a baby-sitter for my own children. Nisa was always very open throughout the project and very comfortable with any questions I asked her and being photographed. Nisa was the first of the girls to see the collection of images of her self taken throughout the six years and had the maturity to identify that she was very self obsessed as an eighteen year old, but recognised that it was important to include those particular quotes and images as a representation of her life and how she had changed. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Nisa, see Appendix A, pp.lxxii-lxxvii)
Priyanka

Priyanka went to an exclusive public secondary school where an entrance examination had to be passed by all attendees. Her parents had her sit every scholarship entrance exam for all the scholarship entry secondary schools in Melbourne. Priyanka’s family are Indian and she lives with her parents and younger brother in an outer suburb of Melbourne’s south west. Priyanka started university as soon as school finished enrolling in a Degree in Marketing and Business. Earlier in high school Priyanka was interested in pursuing music as a career but her mother warned her off a profession that wouldn’t be financially rewarding.

Priyanka had worked part time since she was fifteen and her parents instilled in her the value of saving money. Once she finished her degree she started working for the same major Australian bank where her mother works. Priyanka took a six month break in her degree to travel overseas with friends. She paid for her trip with her life savings that she had earned since she was fifteen. Her parents finished building a new house in 2008 with the design input of Priyanka and her brother, where they all intend to live until Priyanka and/or her brother marries. Priyanka considers her parents to be very progressive in Indian standards but during her three year relationship with her boyfriend, Luis, she never told them they were romantically involved. He was only ever introduced as a friend. Priyanka has since finished that relationship and remains single. Her family are the main providers of her emotional support. A regular theme in the interviews, with Priyanka while she was at university centred around her struggle with maintaining focus and motivation for her degree. She appeared to me to be very work focused and used that as a conversation point in our interviews avoiding personal questions. She felt that working in the industry part-time during university would put her ahead of her peers when it came to applying for a graduate position. By doing part-time work in the industry, she was able to gain a graduate position that had not been previously advertised. When asked if
she could identify a time or period when she felt she had made the transition from teenager to adulthood, she said she always felt as though she was grown up, and she never felt that there was a big shift in her attitude or way of coping with life. She always felt comfortable in knowing how to cope with life and how to handle it. Only in the very last contact with Priyanka did she invite me to photograph her during a social occasion. Her reaction to my presence throughout the project was very similar to Feven's in that I was a stranger and only the questions I asked needed to be answered in a short, succinct manner. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Priyanka, see Appendix A, pp.lxxviii-lxxxvi)

Shayna

Shayna went to a public secondary school in Melbourne's Eastern suburbs after leaving a Steiner school in Year 11. She lived with her mother and younger brother until the end of secondary school. Her Australian parents had divorced prior to the beginning of the project, but Shayna shared living with both of them and also lived with flat-mates during the course of the project. She is currently living with her girlfriend in share house accommodation. Shayna returned to secondary school in the year after Year 12 to repeat studies of Year 11 and 12 Mathematics in order to increase her tertiary entrance score to study music therapy. She started a Degree in Social Work at a university outside of Melbourne in 2004 but did not finish the degree. In 2005 Shayna was diagnosed with the medical condition of Bi-Polar - Depression, and spent most of the year in hospital. She returned to live with her father during that time. She has been in three serious relationships over the time of the project. Due to her medical condition, Shayna is on a disability pension (government financial support) and works minimal part time hours at a night-club. She intends to return to university within one or two years.

Shayna felt that a huge milestone for her was returning to work after being in and
out of hospital. She felt she was able to monitor her illness better and although her parents did not want her to move out of home when she did, they are now more confident in her ability to manage her mental health. She also felt a sense of freedom when coming out with her homosexuality prior to being diagnosed with her illness in 2005. When I first met Shayna she had a long term boyfriend. It was a surprise when I was told by a third person that she had become a lesbian. Shayna was always extremely uncomfortable with being interviewed and photographed. In order to confirm and enquire about her homosexuality, I had to ask her, and thus reveal who had told me. It wasn’t exactly a problem but it didn’t ease the situation. Her inspiration to enter the Music Therapy industry comes from both parents. Her mum is a Social Worker and her father (also diagnosed with Bi-Polar) is a Psychiatric nurse. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Shayna, see Appendix A, pp.lxxxvii-xcii)

Zoe

Zoe attended a public secondary school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne after attending a Steiner school until Year 11. She transferred schools due to the focus on music the public school offered, and boarded with her best friend Dash and his family up until the middle of Year 12. She then returned to live with her father and three sisters in a country town outside of Melbourne, commuting over an hour each way to school and home until the end of Year 12. Zoe’s Australian parents had separated when she was fifteen. In the year following secondary school, Zoe began a hospitality course through a major city hotel, but did not complete it. She has had a number of part time jobs over the course of the project, in both hospitality and retail, lasting anywhere from six months to a year. Once she had finished school, her father chose not to support her financially any longer. She felt cast out by her family, and went through a period of confusion, uncertain of her place in the world, and the expectations placed upon her. She sought the emotional support from a counselor at that time.
Zoe is currently studying natural therapies at a private college in Melbourne, financed by her father. She is currently in a relationship and has been for a year. Prior to that she has had one other boyfriend during the project. She felt that her turning point was forced upon her, when, at the age of sixteen, her parent's separated. She felt too young to carry the responsibility their separation had placed upon her. She felt that her ability to cope was being tested yearly, and she is only now beginning to feel that she is experiencing adulthood. My connection with Zoe began through a close mutual friend and I felt that the information often given to me by the friend influenced what I asked her. I believe Zoe felt that she also could only give me censored answers for fear that information would leak back to her family. The last time I met Zoe, the change in her was enormous, she had grown from being a fidgety, shy, unresponsive teenager to an enthusiastic and happy young woman. Her father confirmed the change in her and thought this project had been very beneficial for Zoe and how she could identify how far she had come. (Full transcription of audio interviews for Zoe, see Appendix A, pp.xciii-ciii)

The purpose of the above synopses is to highlight that not only was each girl remarkably different from the next, but their paths of transition from teenagers to adults did not follow any stereotypical chain of events. They did not conform to any set milestone achievements of any of the studies mentioned earlier in my research. Their personal acknowledgements and enlightenment about their own independence, self-realisation and maturity was, with the exception of a few, triggered by a period of time in which each one experienced a moment of understanding that they were able to cope, a moment usually involving significant emotional upheaval.

My relationship with each of the girls ranged from being included almost as a family member, to being an independent party to which they could off load their issues and for some, nothing more than an interested stranger to whom, I felt, they needed to be on their best behaviour. Throughout the six years, with the
exception of Nisa and Linda, not one of the girls made contact with me. All communication was instigated by myself.

Email messaging only became a popular and reliable form of contact with nine of the girls at the end of the project (late 2008). The difficulty in keeping contact with them occurred when they changed or lost a mobile phone or moved house. Maintaining a trail of contact through family members and old flat mates often meant that a further period of three to six months would pass before contact was made again. These difficulties, and co-ordinating suitable meeting times and places for both parties, meant that there were long gaps, sometimes more than a year, between interviews and photo sessions.

Our meetings would take place at the girls' homes, workplaces or place of study. Each meeting involved a recorded audio interview followed by a photo session. During the interviews I found most of the girls were relaxed, and over the six years, many let their guard down and began sharing very personal stories. When the girls were photographed after the interviews, in most cases they appeared to be very self conscious and uneasy, despite the interviews revealing confident and forthright young women. The difference in demeanor from just being heard to being looked at was significant. During the photo sessions I would often engage them in conversation to help them relax. Reviewing the audio interviews conducted over the six years, I am able to identify a level of trust developing and forming with the girls. Some of them would talk freely about what had happened since our last meeting, without having to be asked. Others required a structured interview in order to get them talking or to reveal any information that could be useful to the project. In the latter example those girls tended to be more guarded about their feelings or desires for the future. Their ability to reflect on what had happened to them since the beginning of the project, and their opinions on how they thought they had matured or changed, appeared to come less easily. The responses changed each time this question was asked, but in all cases those who could identify a change or a moment of self-realisation that had occurred
over the six years noted that a significant turning point in their lives happened after an emotional trigger or a personal event.

Often some context is lost in a snapshot, but at the same time, new unrecognised contexts can be appreciated or imagined, inviting a more inventive response that can highlight a truth otherwise obscured in the changing sequence of time captured by film. Because the work was partly inspired by photo albums, I chose more formal posing when composing the photographs. The formal posing also allowed the subjects to consciously project themselves, providing me with an insight into how they thought about themselves. This was important in seeking to capture their process of self-realisation. It also identified that the documentary was as much about the subject's engagement with the photographer and the intent of the project as it was about the self they wish to reveal both visually and audibly to the viewer.
Chapter Four - Conclusion

We reconstruct our personal histories and other people's histories through family snapshots and both personal and public episodic memory. This project has sought to capture the transition from teenager into adulthood through a series of captured still visual moments and quotes.

Despite some Australian research suggesting that the process of becoming an adult can be defined in reaching certain milestones (Sweet, 1998), this paper has sought to identify that personal emotional experiences play a major role in an individual's construction of a sense of self. (Wooden, 1998) (Wynn, J., 2004 pp.6-12.) The failure of the research to include this significant process may be because these events are so many and varied, that it would be impossible to identify and chart them all.

In the research on memory and how our memory helps create who we are, Hirsch, Kuhn and Langford are some of the researchers cited in this paper who believe that self-realisation often triggered by memory and family snapshots, helps each of these women identify who they are and how they place themselves in society. It can be argued that Sweet's milestones do establish an independence for an individual, but independence alone is not a measurement of adulthood. (Wynn, 2004)

In each girl's case, the moments where they identified growing up, was a period where they were made to look around and realise that they were capable of acting on their own, i.e. they realised their independence rather than just being independent. The transition processes occurred through personal trigger events reliant on each girl's individuality and their own response to outside and personal influences.
By documenting via the artistic medium of photography and audio recordings, the process of this research project produced a humanistic result through the relationship I built with each of the girls over the six years. Each girl's photographs show a progressive change in their physical appearance and demeanor, and a poetic link produced by the text offers moments of change brought on by various influences and events in their lives. The images create an episodic time line reminiscent of our memory, allowing windows to the past to be opened for as long as the viewer wishes to be drawn in to that time. More importantly the change of the girls within the images reveals how they regarded me as their documenter and how they wished to be portrayed over that period of time.

The purpose of this documentary was to show the transition period of teenage girls to adulthood. The style of photography with text used in following this documentary successfully shows this transition. Although gaps are prevalent in some of the stories there is still an obvious change throughout each girl's collection of images that can be identified as a maturing and self awareness. The text highlights the change in age and self-realisation and aids the photographs in completing each story. Reflecting on my own process of entering adulthood I am unable to pin point a time where I feel I made the transition from being a teenager. It is my belief that unless the question “When did you feel you had grown up?” is posed on a regular basis, the period of time moves quickly by without analysis. When an object is under scrutiny it is easier to see changes happening, over time when that same question was asked to each of the girls on a regular basis their answers changed constantly until the final two years of the project when they were able to reflect on the time line of the documentary and associate certain personal moments with their current outlook, rather than milestones relating to career, living arrangements or relationships.

Although final editing of the images and text was my decision, what they revealed in the interviews, and what they presented to me visually, was, in a sense, their
own form of editing. I am sure that there are many stories within the six years that remain untold and possibly the ‘self’ each of the girls presented was not a true depiction of their character. Within a family photo album posed portraits reveal captured moments in time, in which we present our desired image to the camera. Over the period of childhood, adolescence and adulthood our expressions change to reveal our projected version of our selves. It can be argued that we develop a self-confidence and self-realisation to show what we want others to see, rather than showing what we believe others wish to see.
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Plate 9. Rineke Dijkstra
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ALEX


Carla Gottgens: Alex can you start by telling me a bit of background information about yourself?

Alex: I live with my mum and dad, I have an older brother and two younger sisters. I go to a public high school with Nisa and Erin (who are also in this project). We live in a house that is partly a converted shop front. The shop front is my bedroom.

When I finish school my plans are to possibly do a naturopathy or massage course but definitely not go to university. I would love to study Jazz at the Victorian College of the Arts but the idea of four years of study is a bit daunting. At this point I don’t want to apply until 2004 (in two years time). The naturopathy course only goes for four weeks. I am very music orientated and I would like to have a music career.

Carla Gottgens: What would you say your dreams are for the future?

Alex: My plan when I finish that course (Jazz at the Victorian College of the Arts) is to organise a music event with all of my friends who are in bands. I want to travel around Australia and tour from pub to pub or anywhere and get the local papers involved so that word gets out about a traveling festival. I’m going to try and organise it, a lot of my friends from last year are studying sound engineering courses. Most of my friends are into music and learning the backward stuff of it. I know a lot of people, we’ll be good, I really want to do that. We just want to tour, I just started a band a few weeks ago, we have no name, I’ve been playing, singing and guitar for four years, so I have so many songs and so many demos but I’m a very good guitarist and I feel more confident with a band behind me and I like the sound of double bass and stuff like that. I have a bass player and a guitarist and we have been working together and it sounds really good. So we might have something to show for it. I did battle of the bands for Queenscliff and we won. And we are going back this year, it’s a jazz band called Sympatico, like jazz funk hippy fusion, hip hop. I have played at Ceres, we have kind of broken up off the record because people have gone to university but that’s a paying gig so we will get
back together for it. We've played a few gigs like High Street festival and all that. I'm also in another band called Brad Binks Jazz Quintet, it's just like people from that band without the hip hop, cause there's this one person who is into hip hop and he can rhyme so it makes it hip hop. My aim in life is to get to Port Fairy on stage number one and have everyone in the audience own a copy of my cd and go "oh Alex" and I'll go "yeah, and I'll sign your cd afterwards". And I'll meet everybody and when I get enough money from doing that I'll go and, oh......... and I forget my dream now......... I'll get lots of money when I do that, and what will I do, I forget but I get to a vineyard, oh that's right I'll go overseas to all the other festivals, like the folk festivals and when I get enough money from that I'll buy lots of venues and I'll make the live stuff happening and I'll get really good bars that don't have smoking and no-one is allowed to get drunk, they're just allowed to get tipsy, we'll have lots of nice hippy food and it'll be good. And after that because I'll be old like 40...30, feeling a bit worn down and I'll need a relax. Buy a vineyard and have wild Cuban nights.....

I think my dad wants me to become famous and sell out so that I can pay him all the money back that I owe him.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you mean sell out as people have criticised the music artist Moby?

**Alex:** Yes, I want to be a controversial artist, not one where people tell me to be pretty in pink. An artist in any medium can make art or music to satisfy the masses if they choose to but it may not satisfy the artist. A fake drum beat is the most ridiculous thing on earth, being in a room with a real drummer you can feel the beat through the floor but you can't even remember a fake beat later on.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do your final marks in Year 12 concern you if you are trying to get in to the VCA?

**Alex:** I don't care about my Tertiary Entrance Score (TER), I don't think I will stay in Melbourne next year but possibly go to Western Australia, I don't know why. My closest friend is a girl called Tia who I have known since Year 7. Tia can speak fluent German, she is studying Arts History and is a fantastic artist and a great drawer, I think Tia is a genius. Tia's dad wants her to become Prime Minister of Australia.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you work part time?

**Alex:** I work part time at an organic whole foods store, I am excited about saving money and filling up the herbs. My view of the store is that you get five fantastic people a day because of the type of shop it is, where any other store you might only get one fantastic person in a year.

I have chosen to be a vegetarian although my family isn't. My older brother is trying to breed a new breed of dog, an Australian Staffordshire. I don't think
my parents are very supportive. My father had a breakdown when I wanted to move in to the shop space attached to our home because it was classified as the family space where everyone could make a mess. While I was away on a trip to Port Fairy my mother created a mosaic on the wall of that room but didn’t bother moving any of my possessions away so the mess was everywhere. When I asked my mum why she had chosen to create the mosaic then and not later, she said that she knew I was coming back the next day so she had to get it started. She knew that I was planning to move at the end of the year so why couldn’t she have waited? She complains that I don’t let her do anything.

**Carla Gottgens:** What is your relationship like with your dad?

**Alex:** He has a very bad temper, threatening me when I do something wrong and using emotional blackmail. He has issues with me moving out and no longer needing their support.

They need to come to terms with the fact that they have not been nurturing and protecting me and that I am just moving around them so I should be able to leave with no ties.

My mum looks after my nanna a lot. I don’t sleep very well.

**Gottgens, C. (2003) Interview. (Interview with Alex, 8 February 2003)**

**Carla Gottgens:** Where are you working now? You mentioned last year that by now you would be in Western Australia, what happened?

**Alex:** I started working at the Corner Hotel as a sound engineer. I have spent the last year completing a sound engineer course. At one point I had three jobs including the sound engineering, working at the organic whole foods store and giving guitar lessons. I felt I burnt myself out really quickly and got ill, so I stopped working at the Corner Hotel where the shifts were very long and the environment was smoky. My work at the Corner Hotel was unpaid, I don’t think they were taking advantage of me, I was able to choose what I got involved in at the Hotel and if I didn’t feel comfortable doing a particular job I didn’t do it.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you have a boyfriend at the moment?

**Alex:** My last boyfriend was Chris, but we had broken up a while ago. You know you get sick of these boys and their little dilemma’s.....we had a band but it never went anywhere.

(I went to see Alex perform in the Busker’s Festival at the Sydney Road Street Party in Brunswick. She left before the winners were announced which was much later in the day. Alex’s description of events was that even though she was placed third she could have come second if she had been there to claim her prize.)
After High School I did a Music Theory class in contemporary jazz at Greensborough TAFE. My dad would drive me the one hour it took to get there once a week at 6pm and wait for me to finish three hours later to drive me home. He was very keen for me to do the course, I wasn’t that enthusiastic about it. This inspired me to think about getting my drivers license, I aimed to commit to sitting down and reading the book to sit the exam. When I decided to do this I also decided to do some other work and approached a yoga and dance company called Mangala to ask if I could work for them in exchange for a free class. I wasn’t keen on getting paid for my work there as it would affect my Centrelink payments. At this stage I was doing a lot of unpaid work in exchange for classes or yoga teaching but found it hard to work on Sundays which I have now done for the past two years when everyone else is relaxing on that day.

**Carla Gottgens:** What happened to your plans to go and study at the VCA?

**Alex:** I don’t want to do the Jazz Impro class at the VCA anymore I want to go to Lismore. This is what happened first of all my dog died, the time just before everything was happy and beautiful, I was helping the woman down the road who is an artist with some admin stuff for an upcoming exhibition. And then I was meeting a band across the road and offered to help out with them. Then the dog died and I felt like not doing anything anymore. Then a man got murdered around the corner from where I live. I heard the sound of gun shots outside my window while watching a Harry Potter movie in my bedroom and I told my sisters that the sound was fire crackers. My sisters were squeezing past me on to the street to see what the commotion was and I was saying no, get back. We chopped down a tree in our backyard after the dog died, it is symbolic in my family to chop down a tree when someone dies. The man’s brains were blown all over the street and the police didn’t do a very good job of cleaning it up. I had done my research about all the jazz and music courses I could do. On that week that the man was murdered I had a bad vivid dream that my dad died and I went to their room crying and slept with them, then went and did my research into the dream at the library and I found out that the dream meant I was going to move to the country. I was already thinking about moving to the country like Byron Bay. Then I found out my friend’s dad had a stroke, and all these things happened in one week.

Then I met Tia who was going out with my ex-boyfriend Mark, there was no trust there as she lied to me.

When I first met you I don’t think I could ever have dreamed of moving out of home.

**Carla Gottgens:** But Alex you told me that within a year you would have moved out of home and be driving around Australia in a combi-van?

**Alex:** Oh! that didn’t happen because I don’t have a car. I have started collecting suitcases and keep all my clothes in them and my shoes and travel gear for everything. I look at my room and work out what I would need and
what I could fold in to a cubic square and take with me. So I have practiced
that all year and now I know what I will take.

**Carla Gottgens:** What else have you been doing over the past year?

**Alex:** I studied fashion for a while, I did a lot of short courses, I made the
costumes for a circus group. And I met this boy and I was too polite and I
couldn’t tell him to fuck off. And my contact with the circus group was Noah
and he had a crush on me and I was too blind to see. The costumes were
made out of spandex and I hadn’t worked in that fabric and my machine kept
fucking up and I had to ride my bike over to my mums and borrow my mum’s
machine. I didn’t think I realized their vision in the costuming and so they got
someone more experienced to make them. I should have invoiced them but I
never did and only got paid half.

I was trying to get my portfolio ready in order to finish my fashion course.

**Carla Gottgens:** How is your relationship with your parents?

**Alex:** My relationship with my dad has changed. I think I have formed more
respect for my parents now. Because my dad takes me to my course I bond
with him and he treats me more like an adult. Also having a boyfriend come
over to my house, my parents saw how I was growing up.

**Carla Gottgens:** What about your music dreams?

**Alex:** I know there are no boundaries with my music, sound engineering was
fun but I don’t like the atmosphere, there is too much pressure. I would like to
be more laid back in a recording studio where I can produce my own stuff. If I
do a course like that then I can be a manager as well. And all that is roped in
with having a combi-van and going around Australia and being on Stage One
at Port Fairy Festival. I don’t want the responsibility at the moment of being
the head chief, it isn’t my look.

By the end of next year I want to be an accomplished song writer, I will know
my scales and my dictation and all the stuff I should have learnt last year for
VCE so I can just walk in to an AMB exam for a grade 4 or grade 8.


**Carla Gottgens:** Alex what are you up to at the moment?

**Alex:** I am performing with a funk hip hop band called Sister She. They
advertised for people to do workshops for Melbourne Fringe Festival and I
liked it.

I had to quit everything as I was going insane as my best friend, the artist
down the road, died of an epileptic fit and I was about to move in with her.
Then my organics job got cut down, and I felt “man I’m just a yoga teacher”,
although I was doing all these things I loved.
I was interested in interviewing people at the Corner Hotel where I had worked the previous year as a sound engineer, but they weren’t very helpful and that fell through. Then I got a job in a sandwich bar full time and saved lots of money and booted Melbourne and went to Brisbane. I bought a bike, a bass and a piano and worked as a waitress living with family in Brisbane.

I was meant to be back in Melbourne for an audition to study but I missed the date as I met a boy and my phone cut off.

I was stuck in Sydney and couldn’t get back and had three days to get back and perform my audition for RMIT and it just didn’t happen.

When I did get back to Melbourne I couldn’t handle my family and so moved out for three months, then moved back home and then moved out to live independently with one other person in a three bedroom house. We had a healing room and a music room, no tv, no cats and no dogs. Just me and my brain and my ambitions. My brother just went on medication recently after being on drugs for years and I sort of missed out on that family environment for most of 2004 as I spent a lot of time at friend’s houses. My sisters would tell my how violent he was and I only thought he was violent towards me. My dad told him to go on rehab and they kicked him out until he got his act in to gear. He is now on medication to treat bi-polar and was self prescribing recreational drugs to counterbalance it. My dad is a social worker for youth the same age who have gone off the rails and I think it would have been very hard for him to watch it. My dad started going on a health crisis doing genealogy and trying to find out what happened to other people’s families as he didn’t really have a father. His dad died when he was 7.

My lecturer told me I must have wanted to fail because I create what happens to me. In my first year I excelled as I was straight out of high school but in my second year I was depressed and didn’t want to go to any classes.

I have just finished my diploma in music industry technical production. Training me up to become a sound technician for animation films like a Foley Artist and a digital editor actually making the music and finishing it. It was like rock and roll high school. I bought a computer but since I have had it I haven’t done anything. I did a late VCAT application for music production, applied to defer, but I think it is too late. I have left messages on the lecturers phones to see if I can get in although that is not the official method of getting in.

I completed two years part time contemporary music theory. My second year of the course was at Fairfield TAFE, I would get there by riding my bike after work every night and every night I would be late getting to class. I failed the course because they changed teachers and none of my work got handed in because the teacher wouldn’t pass it on or sometimes I just didn’t do it. But I have a letter to say that I failed. And spent a year applying for other courses and would show my letter of failure. I would be asked what I thought about the failing and I would say I had made my lesson.
I have decided not to apply for the VCA any more as they knocked back a friend of mine who I thought deserved to get in. When I did go to one of their auditions (it is unclear exactly when this was), they tested my on my chords, which I knew, “I was immaculate” they said but they asked my “Don’t you think you are a bit like Nelly Fertado?” and I said it doesn’t matter what I sound like, wouldn’t that be a bonus that I sound like Nelly? I said I thought I was more like Sarah Vaughan.” I think the VCA shouldn’t be looking for anything they should just get what they are given. I feel now six years after school I am at the point where I can apply financially for it as it took this long to learn what I was about. But they (the VCA) will take international students over local ones especially if they appear to have a struggled background.


Carla Gottgens: The last time we spoke you were performing, what have you been up to since then?

Alex: I haven’t done much performing since the Sister She experience, I have focused on myself this year, not being depressed and negative. I think it is due to my upbringing. My mum was always crying when I was younger, she was an artist and I think I have inherited my parents bad traits. Both my sisters are photographers and I wonder where they get that from. My mum was a manic photographer and I wonder at that. You have to be so organized to be a photographer you have to remember to have the camera, the film and the batteries for every event. I underestimate my mum. I really miss photo time.

My relationship with my dad is better now, he was quite violent both physically and mentally and my brother is psychotic. My brother is a negative presence, he can only relate through twelve year old banter. I went round to my parents place last night for dinner, I didn’t have enough money for food.

I don’t know why my dad was abusive. When I met my brother’s girlfriend, the girl friend had a black eye and I asked my dad if my brother had hit her and he said no it was probably her brother. I asked him “What? Like mum’s brother used to hit her?” knowing that my dad used to say that about my own mum when it was really him. He got very angry when I said this.

My mum thinks my brother missed out on life opportunities as he was raised a Catholic Italian. He was a pro-ice hockey champ at thirteen to sixteen and they would go on tour. And he got into drugs and they became bong heads. He is bi-polar, he thinks he has been since he was young. He says he can hear voices. I think he is just psychic. Me and my sisters are psychic and we get hip pains when my grandmother gets a hip pain. My grandmother is still alive at 93. My last boyfriend was tall manipulative and psychotic and I feel that I am healing my relationships by creating ones that are similar. My current boyfriend nursed his mother while she died from bowel cancer. I was born with a weak bowel. My boyfriend has only just opened up to me about how he nursed his mum and I said wow that was beautiful and I don’t need it explained. My own dad left my family just after my mum had my youngest
sister Gabbie. I was nine and had to change my grandmas’ nappy and my brother was off being a drug addict. Gabby would be left out. When Juliet the next sister down from me was born they asked me what they should call her and I said “BITCH”. Someone must have pointed out to me that I wasn’t going to be daddy’s little girl anymore.

I get $500 a fortnight for being unemployed from Centrelink. But I hate being unemployed. I have another job as a sandwich hand for $15.80 an hour. I love my employer. I have to hand in a form every fortnight at Centrelink. I don’t want to look for work if I have work which is why I opted to go on the books otherwise I would have to be showing that I was looking for work and have job interview receipts etc. I have an idea of what I want to do. I am comfortable that I am going in the direction I want to go in. I want to launch my career in the music industry and not work part time in a crystal shop which is where Centrelink would send me. I want to work in a music store but they send me to stupid interviews and don’t take into account my two year diploma course in music theory.

I’m avoiding the plague looking for work.

I applied for the New Employment Scheme (NES) through Centrelink, it helps you learn business skills. I think I will get in. I am applying for Music Business. I want to take a year off and learn yoga and perform and want to establish myself as a business. I want to know how to put it under a banner to combine my skills for a business. I am excited about it and I want to do it.

I like living with my current house mates, my past ones would just treat the kitchen like a squat as the house was being pulled down.

I can feel people’s energies, I can feel if they are sleeping in another room, I am not a very developed psychic but I feel it. I knew that my last boyfriend was cheating and I would confront him with it and he would lie.

I met my new boyfriend at a party and went to a friend’s house prior to it to get confidence to go and my friend said “You look fly”, and I said “That’s because tonight I am going to meet the man of my dreams”. I got on the train and got a call from my friend who had just had a miscarriage so I was upset all the way to the party and sang to my friend a song over the phone. My friend had been pregnant on and off since fifteen, and she wanted to be pregnant. She is ok now and is five months pregnant and all is good.

On the night I met my new boyfriend at the party, all these hip hop boys, gave me their graf names, and Tev introduced himself with that name (his real name) and I thought it was a joke. I am now into hip hop being only one of two girls in my past music course into hip hop. I was folky and would have said I hated hip hop but I often sway away from things I am scared of. I got sick of the Melbourne music scene. You still have to prove yourself as a guitarist and do a Jimmy licks. And so I recognized that I had attitude and guts and went back to my high school roots when I was in a hip hop/jazz fusion band and started visiting my friends I knew then and started going to gigs like
"Ladies love hip hop" and throwing myself into it. Sister She\textsuperscript{1} were into changing the quota of women. I think they were defensive as they guessed my intentions of wanting to do what they do. And I had wondered why they just wouldn't accept me for who I was. I felt negative energy from that performance experience and a lot of tension.

My friend who had died down the road from my family home was Julie Donald who was a positive role model. She passed away in 2003, she was running an artist residency and we would talk crap together and I would tell her all my ideas. Where now I tell my friends my ideas like I did to my friend telling her I was writing a song about self worth and the next day my friend had a song up on my Myspace called "you gotta love yourself right?". My friends steal my ideas. My friend could have acknowledged me and that I was an inspiration.

Then I asked my friend to be my manager and that I wanted to launch my own EP. And the next day my friend told me "Do you want to hear the good news or the bad news? The bad news is I can't be your manager, the good news is I am launching my own ep!" My friend told me this at work. I have been told to be really careful with my ideas and keep them to myself a bit more. Energetically my friend really changed the moment by telling me at work, I was already demeaning herself by doing manual labour and then my friend sprung this on me at work.

I don't really want to think about the death of my friend. Julie was a ferocious woman and I think she was murdered. Although it was said that she had had an epileptic fit in the shower. Her front window was smashed and she asked the landlord to repair it who declined and instead gave her two weeks notice to move out. There were interconnecting doors between Julie's house and another two that the landlord owned. The landlord wanted to develop the houses and had very large, strong looking sons who appeared to place the heavy on tenants. The row of houses is now developed but after Julie died another one of my friends moved into the same house and on a visit I saw a glimpse of what had happened through my psychic ability, I don't want to think about it. My dad thinks I have an overactive imagination.

When I was little I was always looking for role models because I decided that my parents weren't good enough. My mum is a head case she is always trying to feed me if not with food it's with nonsense info. My dad is like me, lots of ideas, very creative. They can't create as spontaneously as women can due to their male energy. They are both childlike. My parents aren't going to evolve unless they try and think about money differently they have the poverty streak.

I would try and get my mum to think about money differently and suggest budgeting and my mum would say "I can't budget I have people to buy things for and children to feed". I would clean out my mum's cupboards and there would be tea bags and tea bags and more tea bags, "Why are you buying tea bags? You don't drink tea you drink coffee?" I would say. My mum loved me

\textsuperscript{1} Sister She are a Melbourne based hip hop comedy duo.
cleaning out her cupboards because I would tell her what to do. And then I got sick of doing it. My parents get things done but not in time for anyone around them. I needed a guitar when I was younger and had half the money and they would make me feel guilty for wanting something that would be beneficial for me. My sisters now experience the same problem. They needed a Mac computer for school work and I hassled my parents to buy one so my sisters wouldn’t need to spend all evening at school on the school computers. My mum said my dad was going to buy a PC the next day and I went crazy saying it was the wrong choice. And that any creative work needed to be done on a Mac. The next day my dad had bought a Mac, I said “Well isn’t that great, five years too late for me but just in time for my sisters”. My brother was pissed off as he wanted a PC. My mum and dad have more faith in me now I am living out of home. My dad stopped washing my clothes for me and now I am completely independent of them. If I need them it is generally for money advice and my dad will say I will get a loan for you as you won’t qualify. For that to happen with the computer that was like the final battle as I was fighting with my brother between what they wanted and this time my parents listened to me, so that was really good for me, and I am really upset, this was a big battle. (Alex starts crying)

I have always had hand me downs, from my great aunt and my aunt. But sometimes I would like to have something in fashion so I can wear a dress and say wow I have something in fashion although vintage really suits me.

(Alex showed me around her house where she flats with two other people including Nisa (also in this project). Alex had cleared out a storage shed and had set up a sewing room with a dress mannequin and her sewing machine and fabrics.) I aim to continue with the fashion line of things.

**Gottgens, C. (2008) Interview via email. (Interview with Alex, 10 November 2008)**

Alex: I never really thought I was a teenager, but somewhere fear kicked in and I found myself struggling to meet my own high expectations and not coming through with the goods because I wasn’t trusting myself like I did when I was 17 and all I did was right.

For me there are a few events that have taken my feet forward in looking at myself as an adult.

The first one would of been in late 2006 I was 22 and I got up the nerve to budget in my laundry to my out goings, so for the first time as an independent I was supporting myself financially instead of having to ride my bike ten minutes to my parents house to ask my dad to wash my clothes each week.

I will say nerve, because before that I didn’t really understand that it was my responsibility to do such things. I had lived out of home many times in many places but I’d always managed to have help with home-duties. It was a good feeling knowing I was looking after myself, and I can clean whites better than my dad can any way.
Another time when I was very much aware I was no longer a tween-ager was when my two best friends took me out for lunch while my partner (now ex) was overseas and I was hopelessly in love with him, we schemed plots that would get me to him.

At the time Courtney whom I was in a hip-hop funk band with in high school was 22 and with her partner of two years had just had their first baby! Yasmin my best friend from Primary school was 23 at the other side of the coffee table in the Collins St mall and was six months pregnant with her first child with her five year partner.

My love called me and we spoke briefly he was in Thailand and sick of it, I was working really hard in between uni courses, I new what was happening with my friends was a sign that I really had to re-evaluate my efforts at life, if I didn't prioritise soon It would be me with the love baby.... I always had a feeling that there would be children in my life as a young woman.

These two beautiful friendships had reached a dead bolt end to what had been, now it was what will we become, both my besties have little time for time wasters, they are both very evolved mothers. At first it was really hard as I was so dependent on them. I would often call Yas late at night to have a gas-bag or just to cry about one of my spoilt love affairs.

When my relationship folded along with my desires for that outcome for my self, being a mother in love.... I realized I don't want a baby like my best friends, I want a business. I don't want a man to share my hopes and dreams, I want a business partner.

That's what I have been focusing on, that's what I hope to become, a business woman. When it happens reality is I'll be crazy aunty Alex. The fun rock n roll lady to my two little nieces.

The same abundantly high energy, joyful girl but with her smarts about her. I guess it took my heart to break for me to see that I'd matured to some-worldly artifact of a semi free society. I'm very adventurous I often take the difficult road mostly because I like to appreciate the scenery as I walk it.
Amanda


Carla Gottgens: Tell me about your family and your high school history.

Amanda: I grew up with my family in Endeavour Hills, Victoria, with my parents, my younger sister and older brother. My family's background is Malaysian and we speak a combination of Malay and English at home, which we call manglish.

I attend MacRobertson Girls High School\(^2\), which requires an entrance examination to attend. I have been working part time for pocket money during high school at an accounting firm as a filing clerk. As soon as I finished my last exam I went straight to the accounting firm and worked for two months to save money to go overseas. I am aiming for an ENTER\(^3\) of between 90 and 95. I want to get a better score than my brother, which was 98.65 and my father thinks that's possible, he believes I'm smarter. But I think 99 will be pushing it. I have applied for Media and Communications at Melbourne University. My father is very keen for me to also study a double degree in Commerce.

My family and I used to attend a temple at Narrewarren, Victoria, situated in the middle of farmland. The temple taught a stream of Buddhism close to the Chinese and Japanese forms of Buddhism. We attended the temple on a regular basis up until I was fifteen. My dad is still active in the temple in his role as Master of Ceremonies. The entire family was involved in charity work in the temple.

I am very close to my brother, at this time I would consider my brother to be my main influence. Many of my brother's ideas have filtered down to me and as a consequence I believe I look at life in a similar way to him. He has been at me since Year Ten (high school) to discover my passions and to have a

\(^2\) MacRobertson Girl's High School, Victoria, Australia
\(^3\) The Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) is the national Australian tertiary entrance score, administered by Universities Australia. It is designed to make it easy to compare entrance scores for students educated in different process of admission for university applicants from interstate.
meaning to my life. He attends open days for universities with me, he doesn’t want me to turn out like him. He thinks the idea is that everyone should go to university to fit the norm. He believes that if you find something you enjoy and wake up every morning loving what you do you will become really good at it because you enjoy it. And over a period of time you will make money from it because you love it and have become good at it. I see that as a problem with people who have mid life crises. My brother advised me not to waste three years of my life on a degree that eventually I wouldn’t want.

(At this point of the first interview Amanda’s father insisted on being present, and although he sat there with his eyes closed, feigning sleep, it was very obvious he was listening to every word. At the time I didn’t think this was odd but in hindsight with everything that happened afterwards in respect to Amanda’s university choices I find this very important. Every other interview from that point on was done away from the family environment.)

The plan for the end of Year 12 was for a group of my friends to travel to Sorrento for Schoolies\(^4\) week, but this depended on any one or a number of my twenty friends getting their P-Plates. The outcome was that I went straight to work after my last exam and worked at the accounting firm for two months, also tutoring three students every night for two or more hours and then on weekends working at my father’s work, stocktaking. I didn’t do much partying as planned but instead paid for my trip overseas before the university year started. My initial plan was to travel to Malaysia and Shanghai with my two friends, Shing Ling and Cathy. After the initial plans my Aunt in Malaysia took me to Bangkok where I had an eye opening experience watching women shoot ping pong balls out of their vaginas.


**Carla Gottgens:** Tell me what you did over the summer holidays and explain your entry choices to university.

**Amanda:** My entrance score was 98.35. My parents have their sights now set on a double degree for me although my course advisors have told me that it would be very difficult to transfer. While I was overseas my father enrolled me into the media and communications subjects. He scrimmaged through my room, got my tax file number, forged my signature, because the university needed a letter of authorisation for him to enroll on my behalf as I was overseas at the time. He even chose my subjects for me to get started with.

My father was the first person I discussed my course subject selection with when I returned from my holiday, so we specifically chose ones that would gear me towards getting into the double degree. My choice of subjects were the main Media and Communications subjects plus a core Commerce subject. Our focus was to include subjects that may not be intellectually stimulating but ones that would give me large scores. On top of my workload was a second

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\(^4\) Schoolies or Schoolies week refers to the Australian tradition of high-school graduates (known as “Schoolies” or “Leavers”) having week-long holidays following the end of their final exams in late November and early December.
year microeconomics course that my dad really liked, even though I was only in first year. In my first class for this subject the teacher went around the class asking everyone why they had chosen it. Most answers were either that the class was compulsory or that the student liked it, but I told them that my dad really liked this subject, everyone laughed but that is why I did it. My father’s idea behind doing the subject was to earn brownie points as another possible avenue to get in to the double degree but as I found out later the only thing the university is interested in is scores and if they aren’t high enough then you don’t get in.

When I finished Year 12 I won an award from Monash University, Melbourne, for being the best student in my class. The award was $500 in cash, I used it to buy my dad a birthday present, a hot air balloon trip where we ate chocolate cake 5000 (?) feet over the sea at 5am in the morning.

I am still thinking of studying Chinese. I tossed up the idea with my dad as to whether I could fit it into my timetable but the course advisor advised not to do it, as the course was very difficult and took up a lot of time. I think I will still explore the possibility of doing it but my dad wants me to focus on getting a good score.

Ideally I would like to study part of my degree overseas, I am very keen on traveling. My current course doesn’t have any overseas modules but Chinese does.

During my first year of university I had three jobs to pay off part of my end of high school vacation. When I returned from the holiday I panicked about the debt and started working to pay it off. I didn’t think I needed to work that much but got used to it. My money from the accountancy firm went straight to an awards saver account and the rest I saved but didn’t know why at the time, to travel was a possibility. I was going to put it towards my plate (orthodontic treatment) but my dad took care of that for me. My teeth were moving and my parents looked at my teeth when I was younger and said fix them. I never realised that having straight teeth was a cosmetic thing but rather a clinical thing or a condition that needed fixing.


Carla Gottgens: Describe your first year of university, what pressures would you describe you have had and compare it with being at high school.

Amanda: I am feeling a constant push to achieve the goal of getting into a double degree at the end of this year. I feel that not having a core group of friends very disheartening and not what I imagined university to be like at all. I do have friends but I find it difficult to keep track of where they all are as everyone’s timetables are different, it’s not like at school where there was a central place where we would all meet at lunchtime. So I have a huge phone
bill trying to keep track of all my friends. I am used to doing my own thing but not used to others doing their own thing.

I don't have a boyfriend there were a couple of guys who were ok but I opted for "easy" friends only. It's been so long now that I am afraid to get in to a relationship. I've changed my values on what a relationship is and what it should mean. I am afraid another person would put boundaries on me. I did have male friends whose house I would stay over at but believed that as an Asian girl this would be looked down upon and would ruin my reputation. My previous boyfriend was always treated as part of the family, my family were very cool about it and would include him in every family event.

**Carla Gottgens:** How do you feel about the choices you made for your university subjects?

**Amanda:** I am very, very lost at the moment, I don't know if I am all about the money. I don't have a passion at the moment. I didn't enter the course with a passion I entered it by default. I might do journalism or public relations and marketing but if I did do journalism my ultimate goal would be to get on Getaway, just brain dead entertainment. I share my brother's goal in being financially free, not having to work but having a steady income. I want to have a job in ten years but investing in something that is more like a paid job, like the direction my brother wants to go in.


**Carla Gottgens:** How did the first year of university go? Did you end up doing the double degree?

**Amanda:** I still haven't applied for the double degree, I don't even know if I want to do it any more. My score average hasn't been high enough for the recommended transfer level. The extra classes I did to boost my score only stressed me out so I dropped them in second semester. My father is still pushing for me to do commerce but we have agreed that perhaps going in to the work force would be more beneficial than studying for an additional two years. I think I know now what works better for me in managing my study. I think the transition from school was enormous but I have learnt now how best I learn.

**Carla Gottgens:** The last time we met you mentioned how you found it hard without a core group of friends, has that changed?

**Amanda:** My group of friends changed when a school friend studying Science at Melbourne University invited me out with a group of guys she hung around. This was how I met my boyfriend Alex although at first we would meet only for coffee or with the other friends in that group.
I did a self-development course called Landmark\(^5\). One of the pieces of homework from the course was to call someone I didn’t really want to call. I chose Alex and after that conversation we started dating. Around the same time I went in to a state of depression and went to seek advice from the University Counselor, she identified my problem as “burn out”, the Counselor was thrilled as she had completed her PHD on “burn outs”. But I still felt that I was slipping.......

The Landmark meetings stepped up a notch and the more I did the more they phoned my to encourage me to continue with the courses and do an advanced one. I enrolled in the advanced course with money I didn’t have, borrowing $800 off my father. But I felt I had fallen off the Landmark bus and I was willing to forfeit the $200 deposit for the course. Alex also suggested I stop going to Landmark and not to waste my money. He had done all this research into Landmark and thought they were an underground cult trying to brainwash people.

After my mid year exams, I had to complete a number of essays. I was still living at home at the time and my father would leave for work in the morning and I would be asleep, he would return in the evening and I would still be asleep. My pattern during the day was to get up, shower, binge eat and watch television, although I hated television. I was phobic about doing my assignments and by this point knew I would fail them and didn’t care. I wasn’t sure if it was the pressure of going to university with such a heavy workload and outside work as well. I also felt I was really struggling with my commerce subject but felt I had no one to turn to or talk about it. Usually my brother was the one who I could talk to and get advice from but I think he just gave up on me as he didn’t want to be around me anymore, and he was my best friend so that was a real downer. He used to be the person who supported me and helped me out. I was crying every time I was at home and I didn’t know why.

At this point I was seeing more of my boyfriend Alex and he would often stay overnight. Although this had happened many times, Alex slept on the floor of my room and we left the door open. My brother could have girlfriends over in his room with the door closed but the double standards allowed were passed over by my dad.

My father worried that other people would find out about me although nothing was going on, and he used one of my school acquaintances as an example I should follow. I knew the girl in question lived a double life and I confronted

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\(^5\) Landmark Education claims to be a global leader in the field of training and development, offering courses and seminars that it claims are innovative, effective, and immediately relevant. The Landmark Forum, the foundation of all Landmark Education’s programs, is designed to bring about a fundamental shift or transformation in what is possible in people’s lives.

Participants in Landmark’s courses, seminars, and programs see new possibilities for effective action in everyday matters. People are able to achieve higher standards of excellence and to think and act beyond existing views and limits - in their personal lives, relationships, and wider communities of interest.
my parents with whether they wanted me to lie about my life and do things behind their back's.

(This argument between Amanda and her parents had occurred the night before we met for the interview on 23 December 2003)

I packed some things and headed over to Alex's place to stay. I was very unhappy and wondered if I was going to be spending Christmas day with my parents.


Carla Gottgens: The last time we met you had just had an argument with your parents and you were considering moving out. Tell me what has happened since Christmas and describe how you are coping with your second year of university.

Amanda: Well after that argument, things sort of blew over but I decided I wanted to move out, so I went to the temple and asked my master who told me not to move out so I didn't. Even though I had already found a place and was planning on moving in with friends.

I'm still a bit unhappy with my family life, but I don't feel so lost anymore at university. I was interested in public relations and was thinking of doing copy writing. I want to do things I like and the rest will fall in to place.

I have started studying Chinese, I am still interested in doing public relations but I'm more interested in not for profit organisations and possibly working in third world developing countries. It came to a point where I just didn't know what I wanted to do, I couldn't see any path ahead of me, so I made an appointment with a careers counselor at university to really just get some ideas going. I was walking to the appointment with Alex and he asked me if I had enough money that I didn't need to work for it, what would I choose to do with my time? And I thought what I would love to do is go and work for an aid organisation in a developing country. So the decision was almost as easy as that, by the time I got to the appointment I had something in mind to discuss instead of just saying "I don't know".

I am particularly interested in Asia, seeing as my ethnic background is Asian I feel I would fit in better than trying to work in Africa for example. My family are just glad now I have decided on something although my mum still asks sometimes why I just didn't study law? Alex my boyfriend is also studying Chinese. I probably live equally at his place and at my parents. His apartment is closer to work and university, it makes it easier to fit more work and study in than having to travel back to my parent's house.

Alex's dad was one of those creative geniuses who was a bit mad and when I moved in with them Alex's siblings told me I was really brave. They only saw him about once a year at Christmas and that was really to see their mum.
I kept on with the Landmark course I had enrolled in and got to the point where they asked my to undertake a community project. I was organising a camp-out with the help of my brother, but it got delayed for lots of reasons so we haven't actually done it. My relationship with my brother has improved since I stopped talking about my issues with him. That was the last Landmark involvement I had and I have come to see what their intentions are. They were trying to change the way people thought for the better and how you could turn a situation around to benefit yourself and others.


Carla Gottgens: You are just about to finish university, tell me what your goals are now in the short term.

Amanda: I have just finished my degree in Media and Communications and am heading to China to complete my double degree (Media and Communications and Chinese). In six months I could complete it by studying in China then returning to Melbourne to sit one last exam. Alex is staying behind as he has a master plan that he can save money to put a deposit on a flat for the two of us and buy a car.

Carla Gottgens: Is he the one?

Amanda: (pause)......I don't know, it's a bit scary. At the moment it's ok, he thinks I am the one........

Carla Gottgens: Have you had anything more to do with Landmark?

Amanda: I am now over Landmark but my Dad has become very keen on it and has recruited many of his friends in to it. I think it was a good thing for me at the time and it helped smooth things out. I still remember what I learnt but now I'm not so heavily involved.

I'm really scared about going to China and don't know what to expect having heard many contradicting stories. My Chinese course has been bazaar in the process in which we learn words and sentences, I still don't know all of the colours but I can say "I just had a business negotiation."

Carla Gottgens: Up until now what would you identify as being the hardest transition time for you over the period when you finished high school to now?

Amanda: The first year of university when I went through a state of depression and the big expectations placed on me. Everyone tells me my expectations were my own not other people's. I think that on the surface the stress was what my parents expectations were but ultimately I think it was me. I control what I stress out about. My parents have been really supportive throughout the whole thing.


Carla Gottgens: It has been two years since we last spoke although I have
seen you briefly at the airport when you flew back to complete your last exam. Tell me about your experience studying in China for six months and is Alex still on the scene?

Amanda: Alex had come to visit me in April of 2006, in China. I hadn’t really talked to him much, maybe twice, by the time I started studying I didn’t really miss him at all and didn’t yearn to speak to him or anything like that. Clara my friend in Melbourne told me I needed to get out of the situation with Alex and even my mum had said that maybe during the seven months I was going to be away something would come of that, and she was right. Then Alex came to surprise me in Shanghai in April with a brand new lap top. I had actually bought him a computer and some of his school books, part of his car and his insurance as he wasn’t as financially independent as I was. So he brought me a laptop so I could talk to him for free on the internet because I wasn’t calling him. He had always promised that he would pay me back for the computer I bought him.

The break up was hard, he didn’t quite understand why I wanted to break up. He was a bit self destructive and would burn his arm with a cigarette if things looked messy. When I broke up with him he smashed a plate over his head and there was blood everywhere. It took us about a week to break up in China and he was really alone and vulnerable as he didn’t know anyone else. It was the worst time and place for me to break up with him as he had come on a romantic whim as a surprise.

Carla Gottgens: Would you say that Alex had an effect on the decisions you were making at the time you were together in Australia?

Amanda: He would influence me but it depends on what, I made a lot of financial decisions based on him. I was working something like three jobs as I felt we didn’t have enough money. But I made the independent decision to go to Shanghai and study for six months regardless of him.

Carla Gottgens: Do you think he felt that your involvement with Landmark was coming between the two of you?

Amanda: Yes, he didn’t understand it and was very suspicious. He came and made a scene at Landmark thinking it was a cult and the leader was a child molester. I discussed it at Landmark as they tend to be very open and they were very supportive of me putting up with him but that tended to reinforce his opinion.

Carla Gottgens: What happened after your last exam in Australia after the China trip?

Amanda: The last time I came back to Australia was in August (2006) and then I quickly returned to China as I had to come back to work as it was a pretty busy time then. I was working with the Australian Chamber of Commerce from September 2006. We had a Chinese and Australian business forum at that time and I had done nothing like that before and I had
to organize it by myself as my immediate boss had left. My title was Marketing Co-ordinator. I found the job on line through a friend. Towards the end of my degree I was getting pretty desperate for work so I started asking around.

**Carla Gottgens:** Did you always plan to stay there and work:

**Amanda:** When I went there to study I always intended to come back but I went on a trek up a mountain with a friend and I decided that I would try and stay there for two or three years and then possibly go to Europe to work and then New York for a year. I was sort of squatting in my friend’s flat while all my friends had gone away for the summer vacation in Europe and America and some weren’t coming back so I felt really alone.

**Carla Gottgens:** Were you desperate to find work from a financial point of view or from a security point of view?

**Amanda:** I guess I wanted to have the security of a job. I never felt worried about money in China for some reason as I didn’t tend to spend much money there. The food is really cheap and the accommodation isn’t that expensive and I guess I always have that reassurance that my daddy will always look after me if something really bad happens. I have been lucky to not need him that much but I know that he is there financially. All along I have been financed in some way working for myself so I have never really needed him.

**Carla Gottgens:** How did you meet Stefan? (I lost contact with Amanda for a period and her mother gave me her new contact numbers in Nuremberg, Germany where she is currently living with her husband. In this interview I had Amanda tell me the history of the last two years, hence the previous knowledge I had about her husband, Stefan)

**Amanda:** I met Stefan through some flat mates and he came over for a house warming party and we went out on to the balcony to have a cigarette and I was whipping out all of these witty comments and he just wasn’t getting them so I got bored. I thought he was good looking but that’s about it. He was fluent in English but he just couldn’t understand me!

I was brand manager for Fosters, looking after the Australian portfolio for them. It felt like I was more of a product manager making sure shipping and purchase orders were correct. So after a while I was looking forward to moving away from that. By that stage Stefan and I knew we wanted to live together. A big company in Germany had approached Stefan three times with a job offer, so we talked about possibly me going to Germany instead of him coming to China and working. It would also mean that in three years or so he would be eligible to work overseas for them and I still wanted to work abroad so we thought it would work out quite well and he would get double the salary and the expatriate benefits.

I was kind of ready for a move, it was sad to say goodbye to all my friends in China, but I was looking forward to something new. I had been looking for
work in Germany while I was in China. In September/October I decided I had learnt all I could at the Australian Chamber of Commerce and that was when I started working for Fosters. I went to Germany for Christmas and then in January my little sister came over to China and just the two of us went to Inner Mongolia for a holiday, it was quite cool, just trekking around. She was in Beijing doing a mini exchange. I was applying for places like Adidas in Germany at companies that don’t need you to speak German. But Stefan was also applying for jobs in Shanghai at the same time. He decided to take one that was offered but within a few days of completing the paper work I found out I was pregnant. So after a few days we decided to keep the child, luckily I decided to stop smoking naturally before then. He kind of had a clue as I had felt queasy while I was in Germany and couldn’t stand the smell of alcohol or cigarettes. So we thought if we wanted to stay in China or go somewhere where there were sunny skies, so he turned down his Shanghai offer and picked up the German job. Then in the next two weeks I went back and forth to the doctor but they couldn’t find a heart beat and it was discovered that I had miscarried. Meanwhile Stefan was in Germany but my housemates were really supportive. They hung out with me in the hospital and when I got home they made these special meals for me that you are traditionally meant to have when you have one of these procedures (abortion) and they wouldn’t let me go in the wind for a week. I thought I was covered by my health insurance, but they only cover maternity related items. And because I went into an expatriate hospital I had to pay around $4000. I had just quit my job so I wasn’t going to get any more money for a while. I was getting a fairly small graduate wage in Australian standards. I thought my family would be really upset about my news of having a baby but they were really excited and they were making their plans to come over. The only negative thing was the passing comment from my dad that I clearly didn’t practice safe sex, but other than that they were really excited. My mum is now asking me to start trying again really soon. We are planning on leaving Germany in three years and living in Asia and I don’t know how we are going to time it. But we can’t actually afford to have one at the moment as living is really expensive here and we want to buy a car. We are living in a bachelor flat which is tiny.

Now I am in Germany this is the only time I have ever been jobless and it makes me feel nervous. Even when I was studying in Shanghai I was working tutoring people English.

All I do is study German in the mornings so I am free almost all the time.

**Carla Gottgens:** Is your family sad that you are further away?

**Amanda:** No I think they are happy that I am under someone else’s care and that they now have another country to visit. None of my friends have come to visit me. I have been very bad at keeping in touch with my friends in Australia. Even my family I only might call once a month. None of my university or school friends I wouldn’t have a clue what they are doing now.
I am doing some intensive German courses now, but all Stefan’s friends speak English to me.

**Carla Gottgens:** How were you accepted by Stefan’s family?

**Amanda:** They were really accepting from the get go when I first met them in April last year. I think they were happy that he was moving on from his previous girlfriend.

We decided to get married so I could get health insurance in Germany so it was quite practical for us to get married as soon as possible because at that time we thought I was still pregnant. But the whole process would take a couple of months for the paper work to go through and then we discovered that there was a little loop hole in the whole system. Denmark has a one hundred year old agreement with Germany. Germany will instantly recognize a marriage done on Danish soil.

I touched down in Germany on 30 of March and we drove straight to this town in Denmark and it was really depressing. Part of the agreement is that you have to spend two days in Denmark it was like a wedding town that thrived purely on that one hundred year old agreement. Next May we will be doing our proper marriage in Germany but I haven’t had this conversation with any friends in Australia except one.

**Carla Gottgens:** Looking back over the period of the project what was your defining moment that you could identify that you matured or grew up?

**Amanda:** There was one point when I was studying in Shanghai that I realized I was alone and that I had no-one to rely on any more even though my family were there for support, ultimately I was alone and responsible for myself. When I finished my study and ran around looking for work and all my friends had returned to Australia I felt that it was me against the world and I felt I was really alone. When I was working with the Chamber of Commerce I felt I was more on par with the people I worked with. We had a function every Friday called Aussie drinks and I had to organize it every second Friday. The first time it was really freaky but then I got used to it and realized I could mingle with heads of big companies like NAB, and the Australian Counsel General, I didn’t look up to them, I could relate to them on a normal level.

Carla Gottgens: Tell me about your history, your family and what you plan to do after school finishes.

Danya: I was born in Israel, I have two younger sisters, we were all born in different countries. My sisters were born in America and Australia. My parents are both academics, we have traveled extensively all my life.

Carla Gottgens: What do you do socially?

Danya: I am involved in a Jewish youth group called the Hashy\textsuperscript{6} program. Part of this ongoing youth group is to send the members to Israel for a year on a training program where they learn leadership values along the ideologies of the youth program but also work on a kibbutz.

I would be interested in going on the Hashy program, not for ideological reasons although I do agree with the ideology of the movement but that it sounds like an amazing experience. If I chose not to go on the one year trip I would do a general Arts Degree just for pure indulgence, artsy subjects just to be academic, I love that idea.

I would then go into primary school teaching. I chose Melbourne University because my dad works there and I love the location and the campus. I need an entrance score 90.85 to get in but I would like a couple of points above that to make sure I get in. The only reason I would not go to Israel would be the Iraq situation rather than the suicide bombers as they have worked out many ways to circumnavigate these problems. My parents have been very good in this respect and have let me make the decision without forcing me one way or the other. The Hashy group would send the youth members one way or the other irrespective of the war situation.

\textsuperscript{6} Hashomer Hatzair is a Jewish Youth Organisation.
I have pressure from my family to go to university and to do well at school, my mum wants me to be a teacher. There is the pressure to do well within myself as well and not to be a drop kick.

**Carla Gottgens:** Tell me about the high school you attend?

**Danya:** I go to a Jewish school, it’s the largest in the southern hemisphere, my parents are leftist in their political and religious leanings and would be considered Zionists but not in a militant way.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you have a part time job?

**Danya:** I work at a near by café during the day and the night. I feel that waitressing is a universal skill that will allow me to work while traveling around, I feel that my confidence has boosted since working there.


**Carla Gottgens:** Danya, tell me what you have been doing since school finished.

**Danya:** I am a bit of a control freak and have to know what I have planned ahead of me. I had convinced myself I wasn’t going to go to kibbutz with my friends and that I was going to go to the US to visit my family and friends instead. But the Hashy movement held a summer camp and I was unsure if I wanted to do it and commit to it. I had a choice of going to camp or Confest. I chose to go to camp which renewed my interest in going on kibbutz and I knew I wanted to go to Israel for the second half of the year. Since going on the camp I have been focusing on my trip, although I ended up going to Confest as well. So you could say I have had my cake and eaten it and loved it.

On camp we attended educational programs which work with the movement, Zionism, socialism, secular Judaism, environmentalism. There is an element of indoctrination that goes on there but I wouldn’t call it brain washing. I think that my involvement in the movement has been able to recognise there is a level of indoctrination, the structure of the movement is to keep your mind open. The ideas that are presented are the ideas the leaders are interested in so each year may focus more on one thing than another, but it is still open minded. My Hashy movement is a left wing Zionist movement, so they recognise that the Palestinians have a separate state next to Israel, I feel that I am constantly having to justify this to people who get jumpy at the phrase Zionism.

After the Hashy camp and Confest I went to Byron Bay with some friends and experienced life as a backpacker meeting people from all over the world. Then university started, I am still working at night, to save money for my travel

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7 Confest is the largest outdoor alternative lifestyles festival in the southern hemisphere, held during summer in Australia on an annual basis.
after kibbutz. I enrolled in an Arts degree doing psychology, French, modern political ideologies and movements and the history of astronomy. My entrance score was 94.55.

I had a crisis at the beginning of semester and wondered what had happened to my life as I was losing touch with my best friends due to work and study, compared with the active social life I had prior to that. I feel I have to make a huge effort to keep in touch with my close friends who are not at university and I feel it is going to be hard to meet up with my friends who are leaving for Hashy earlier than me. I have chosen to leave later than my friends as my mother’s brother and his family are coming to Australia for the first time to visit so I felt I needed to postpone my trip in order to see them. It was a very emotional time for me to make that decision. All eight of my friends will be there in Israel a whole month earlier than me, and I feel that it would be hard to integrate as my friends would already have formed close relationships and ties with the kibbutz and the people on it.

I still plan on returning to uni after I get back from Hashy, but the youth program friends have warned us that after being away the transition back to university after the trip is often very difficult. My other friends have deferred their university entirely until they return from Israel, so they are not even starting it before going to Israel.

My father pushed me to do my first semester before going away even though I wanted to take off both semesters but I feel I have only benefited from that decision.

The first half of the Hashy overseas trip is subsidized by the AZYC but not the second half so I technically don’t have a commitment to Hashy. Me and my friends who are going to Israel have all planned on going traveling afterwards though not necessarily together. I had a Swiss friend called Alex who I had a kind of relationship with in Australia who I would like to visit in Zurich and see what will happen.

Carla Gottgens: Can you describe the kind of relationship you have with your family?

Danya: I have an equal relationship with my mother, and am big sister to my sisters, but I can also be little sister to my youngest sister. I am very good friends with my father.

Carla Gottgens: What would you say your current goals are with study, work and life in general?

Danya: At the moment I would ideally like to have finished university by the age of twenty-six. I would like to have traveled and to be working as a teacher. I would like to still be in touch with the friends I am in contact with now and would like to be happy with my life, happy with my job, be in a
serious relationship, possibly engaged. I would like to have a wide social scene, I’d like to go to a party and know a lot of people there.

I am quite worried about the environment, but I know my own faults towards that. I think that world leaders should be working towards fixing overpopulation. I am worried about the Israel/Palestinian situation, but I don’t see that there is an easy solution to that in my lifetime. I am more worried about having my luggage stolen in a hostel in Europe than the dangers of being on kibbutz in Israel which borders the Gaza strip.


Carla Gottgens: Now you have returned from your overseas travel and time in Israel, can you explain to me how you are settling back in and what you are doing?

Danya: I found the resettlement back in to Melbourne life very easy unlike what had been forewarned by the Hashy people. I have started back doing my degree at Melbourne University and also at the café where I had been working before I left. I don’t feel any different although I now have some great travel stories to tell.

Carla Gottgens: You were a bit worried about going to kibbutz later than your friends, what was the reality of that?

Danya: I felt that my time on kibbutz was a problem due to my arriving later than my friends but I had predicted that before I left. My friends had already settled and they knew the routine and had already made friends of their own. I found the education program side of the trip more interesting and enjoyable than the kibbutz work. The structure of the program was to move off kibbutz to attend the educational programs. We did community service work like painting kindergartens and also cultural exchange programs with Bedouin kids. We went to the largest Bedouin town in Israel called Raha (?) (Danya said, “you can spell that however you think it sounds”). We ran some Australiana camps but mainly sat around in tents drinking coffee and eating amazing food.

I think I mentioned before I left that I paid for my own trip to Israel, but my friends hadn’t so they had a commitment to being leaders in the Hashy movement when they returned but I didn’t.

Carla Gottgens: Can you describe what life was like on kibbutz considering it’s close proximity to Gaza?

Danya: I never felt in danger, although our kibbutz was next to Gaza. We would hear gunfire a lot and one night people crossed the border into the fields of our kibbutz. Eventually the army caught up with them............ I feel upset talking about the fact that if they cross the border my kibbutz is the first they come to, so if a suicide bomber for instance came we couldn’t go out and
say Hey stop we agree with your situation. I was hoping to get a clearer idea of how I felt about the situation through my trip but instead I feel my emotions are all over the place because of it. I believe they (the Palestinians) deserve their own country but I don’t think the Israeli government are going the right way about it. I don’t see a clear solution. No-one on the kibbutz likes to talk about it.

**Carla Gottgens:** What did you do after your time was up on kibbutz?

**Danya:** After my Israeli trip I went to Europe and traveled with various friends. I enjoyed the backpacker culture much more than the kibbutz experience.

I felt very bored on kibbutz for all that time. I didn’t feel I was my best on kibbutz because I didn’t feel that I accomplished anything. It was different to what I expected. I feel more comfortable in Australia than I did on kibbutz. I like doing what I do......

My outlook hasn’t changed. I like to think I had a worldly outlook to begin with. I had traveled extensively prior to going away. I was a bit of a spoilt brat in the travel department.

Although I didn’t have a commitment to the Hashy project after my return I did become a leader for two years after my trip. I was also completing my degree and had changed my subjects when I returned to include Chinese history, Japanese history, a topical course on terrorism (very popular for the time), and an Islamic studies subject. I loved the Islamic course although I found it very hard to begin with. I made a good friend who was Islamic during the course and it opened my eyes to a different world. My friend is so different to any of my current or usual friends. I am surprised at how normal a teenager she was. I was surprised at how much of a surprise it was.

I also worked less at this point so I could spend more time with my friends.

I have a potential boyfriend, get back to me in six months on him.......

I don’t want to go into too much detail about my boyfriend as it is still early days. I am enjoying having a boyfriend and it makes me happy for the moment. Right now he is doing my C.V. for me at his place.


**Carla Gottgens:** Danya can you tell me what you have been doing over the past year and if you have finished your Arts degree?

**Danya:** I moved out of home and I’m living with an Israeli girl in a small apartment. I wanted to have the experience of working to pay the rent and live with a flat mate. I completed my Arts degree but have started a new degree of Masters of Public Policy and Management. Not the Bachelor of Education I always thought I would do.
I had a crisis not knowing what I wanted to do and knowing what I wanted to do. It seemed like a good option to go into the public service and it still seems like a good option. I have teaching in the back of my mind and may go into it at a later stage but I wanted to have a break from teaching as I had experienced it and still am teaching a Sunday school to children at a progressive synagogue.

My dad had promised me since I was two that he would take me on a business trip one day so at the age of nineteen he did.

I have the same boyfriend that I asked you to get back to me on, his name is Aidan. We traveled together for a month and a half to China. I had saved up to go and was stupidly busy with work all over the place. But now I only have four jobs down from the six I had last year.

**Carla Gottgens:** In our past discussions you have often commented on your concerns over what is going on in the world, have you changed your views on any of our previous talks regarding what bothers you?

**Danya:** I have all kinds of problems in the way the world is going.

**Carla Gottgens:** What are you doing for work at the moment?

I like the idea of working in social services in a managerial role. I am trying to find an internship in the Department of Human Services.

I take tutorials in politics at Swinburne TAFE. My ideal class structure would be to provide a space to create a conversation in my class that the students can then develop articulate talking styles, putting their views into words.

**Carla Gottgens:** With your interest in politics what are your thoughts towards the federal elections that are about to happen in the next few months?

**Danya:** I am very excited about the upcoming federal elections in Australia (it is prior to Kevin Rudd becoming Prime Minister). I am interested in seeing social development and social welfare development and would like to see more of that in my public policy degree. I also vote in the US elections, I have dual citizenship so do my sisters and my mum.

**Carla Gottgens:** After finishing with the Hashy group, how are you feeling with your religious standing now?

**Danya:** I finished working for the youth organization, I didn’t find it hard to stop working there as it was a huge commitment and completely voluntary. I did like it but I was relieved when it finished and I could make money. I was there two half days a week at least. I was thinking I might like to do more volunteer work but with a different organization, when I have more time....will I ever have more time?
I am feeling mixed about my religious beliefs, I am definitely not orthodox at all on the Jewish spectrum. I am very progressive. The progressives try to think about religion more and about practice more. It is important for me to have dinner with my parents on Fridays and to acknowledge all the holidays and marry a good Jewish boy to raise my children in the same way.

My parents are progressive. My mum eats bacon but not openly. My dad used to be very religious. My mum won’t eat bacon in front of anyone but me, she doesn’t want to upset my little sister. My parents do try to keep kosher at home so my sisters understand what it is and it becomes part of their education. My grandma certainly does keep kosher. It would bother Emily to see my mum do something she has been told not to do. They have all been through bar mitzvah and my younger sister is due to do it soon. In the progressive synagogue the girls do the same as boys; they hold the ceremony, learn and speak from the Torah where as in the orthodox synagogue the boys do the whole thing and the girls only have a token ceremony. Aidan was not raised very Jewish, his mum is Jewish but not his dad. He is trying to grow up more Jewish. He thinks retrospectively that he wasn’t given a choice, he chose to have a bar mitzvah.

**Carla Gottgens:** How is your relationship with Aidan?

**Danya:** I would like to go to New York with Aidan and live and work there but paying rent is not conducive to having overseas holidays.

I spend most nights with Aidan. My parents encouraged me to have this relationship with Aidan as they didn’t like the last boyfriend much. I learnt all about sex from school. Every time my mum tried to talk to me about it, I felt intensely uncomfortable. Nothing really ground breaking. But they were openly comfortable with my relationship with boys.

I am at a point where I am always in a crisis. I have been in a relationship for two years now since I was twenty and I wonder if this is the rest of my life? I can see it lasting the rest of my life and I think he too wonders if this is it and maybe we are too young. I think he might be a bit scared off by it so who knows what is going to happen.....


**Carla:** When you look back on the past six years what areas would you recognise as being the moments where you felt you had grown up or become an adult.

**Danya:** I’ve recently completed a Masters in Public Policy and Management, so no teaching for a while. I have a private sector job (temporarily!) which does consulting to government, private sector and non-government organisations largely on training and organisational requirements (I think!). I haven’t written teaching off yet - I really enjoyed the teaching that I’ve done over the last few years. If I don’t like office jobs, I might make it back to Uni to
do education. Although economics was another idea for my next qualification, too.

I'm going to Mongolia on the AYAD program, to do a 5 month development placement. I'm going to be working at an organisation called Women for Social Progress, working on democratic awareness training packages. I'm going for many reasons - I think that development work is important work, and it's a field that I'm interested in (amongst many others, as you may guess!), but I also think that it's time for another adventure, and this program - you can google-search it- provides a meaningful way to do that, while also not costing me anything.

My relationship with Aidan has finished, but the end has been long and drawn out and really messy. It has been my decision not to continue the relationship.

I've had a few moments of feeling that I've made the transition to adulthood. One prominent one was shortly after I moved into my flat in Inkerman Road. I realised that it was now up to me to do my shopping and cooking, and that I wasn't accountable to anyone over what time I would be home, or how long I was going to keep a car. Moving to my new house, which I share with friends in Malvern, has consolidated that feeling. As I'm now geographically further away from my parents, I visit them less, and they have less of an idea of what happens in my day-to-day life. Another prominent revelation was more recently, around the time that I finished my Masters degree. I realised that, on top of the last revelation, that I had no commitments that tied me down for given time periods (eg. I have to be in Melbourne for the next 6 months to finish a degree...). Tied to that, I had been doing a job search that made me feel like I had skills that are valuable to organisations like the one I am currently working at - which felt more adult than just working in bottom-rung and temp kinds of jobs.

That said, I still do feel deep connections to my family, and know that I rely on my parents for emotional support (sometimes!), and advice.
ELEANOR


Carla Gottgens: Tell me about your family and your high school history.

Eleanor: I live with my father in North Carlton. I have one older and one younger brother. Between the three of us we alternate between my father’s house in North Carlton and my mother’s house in Clifton Hill.

I want to study Media and Communications at Melbourne University. Media Communications is my top choice because I want to do professional writing or journalism. I also want to do French to continue it from Year 12. I feel I have to go to Melbourne University because I live in Melbourne and feel I would be so depressed if I didn’t. There was a course at RMIT for journalism only but it was too narrow and they require an entrance exam and select you on your writing skills, I feel that would stress me out too much. I wanted something not to do with science, I hate science. I have been looking at some business related courses but they include maths and I hate maths although I chose it as a subject at school.

I go to MacRobertson Girls’ High School\(^8\), where entrance is based on sitting an examination. Everyone was smart to get into my school, I got the feeling that nothing was good enough, it was very competitive. If you didn’t get an A+ it wasn’t good enough. They take so much pride in their students doing well. I went to University High School\(^9\) and absolutely hated it before I got into MacRob’s (MacRobertson Girls’ High School), I had no friends and I hated the teachers. I made friends in Year 7 who were nothing like me they smoked pot and drank and it freaked me out a lot. I used to get A’s at University High and I got called a nerd and put down and when I started going to MacRob’s getting A’s people would congratulate me and support me, I couldn’t believe the difference. I believe I have leadership qualities. There is a strong leadership focus in my school.

\(^8\) MacRobertson Girls’ High School, Melbourne, Australia (referred to colloquially as MacRob’s)

\(^9\) University High School, Melbourne, Australia
If I don’t get into Media and Communications I would try to get into a Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University and if not there I would go to Monash and do a Bachelor of Arts which only needs an ENTER of 85\textsuperscript{10}. I am not planning on getting less than 85 as I am planning on working really hard. If I got above 99.3 I would do Media Communications/Law. If I got the score I would think, “Why not? I may as well do it and if I don’t like it I can drop out.” I am scared about the job prospect thing but I don’t know why because I hate working. I worked at Brumby’s Bakery in North Carlton, (Melbourne) and I left after a few months, I couldn’t stand it. I worked over the summer which was in 40 degree (Celsius) heat and people would walk in and ask for five pies and I would have to stick my head in the pie oven. I couldn’t stand it.

I am planning on studying for three years and then traveling for a year, I have a scheme of teaching English in France. My mum is fluent in French. I was interested in linguistics and Media Communications offers linguistics. Media Communications is all writing, with studies in cinema, languages, history and a linguistic side. A lot of humanity subjects. I would love to go to France and learn French more, I find I am struggling with Year 12 French it is so hard. I am learning an archaic form of French. When I finish university I really don’t know what kind of job I would like. In Year 10 (High School) there was a survey test I did which reported back what sort of job you would be suited for and mine was museum curator. I like art and would love to write but know I couldn’t do that and I’m trying to be realistic about it.

My role models are definitely not sports people, I thought the commonwealth games was so stupid. I would say my mum but I consider myself to be older than my mum as I am always telling her to behave and what to do. But my parents would be the closest thing to my role models. My mum wanted to travel, she was the crazy one. My dad wanted to stay home and have a job. I couldn’t understand how they got married in the first place because they were polar opposites. They are now separated but I spend time with both of them.

I did ballet for ten years and then moved on to character jazz and tap dancing. I stopped after Year 10 as I felt all balleted out. I also played the flute but also stopped this due to too many extra curricular activities interfering with my final year exam preparations.

My social life tended to be more home based in Year 12, my friends would get together for video Buffy the Vampire slayer nights and eat Chinese (take-away food) but then I knuckled down to study for the end of year exams and my social life slowed down. I am not looking forward to the season of 18\textsuperscript{th} birthdays coming up over this summer, as I’m not due to turn eighteen until next year and I feel that I will be left out in pub and nightclub outings.

I don’t have a boyfriend and I don’t mix much with boys as my school is a girl’s school. I went to the Melbourne High social (MacRobertson Girls’ High School’s brother school) dressed up as a gypsy. We (the MacRob girls) always dress up so it doesn’t look as though we are taking it seriously. The

\textsuperscript{10} ibid.
Melbourne High boys always criticise the MacRob girls but then always invite them to the formal. I didn’t invite anyone to my formal there was no one I wanted to baby-sit the whole night or get together with. I had a chum last year called Andy but this year no-one. I didn’t want to put anyone through that during my final year.


Carla Gottgens: Tell me what university course you are doing?

Eleanor: I am doing an Architecture degree. I was turned off the Media Communications course after reading the hand outs, it didn’t inspire me.

I had done some drawing when I was in high school with a family friend who was an artist and thought it would be cool to draw for a living. I also thought I had done so many essays during my last semester of high school and was sick of it so thought architecture would be more interesting. I made a list of pro’s and con’s because that is what I do. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to do Media Communications although I wasn’t really sure what I wanted. A lot of my friends thought architecture would be really cool. Methods was one of the subjects in Architecture, I had previously said I didn’t want to do anything to do with maths as I found that methods was really hard in Year 12 and found that if I busted my ass studying it I never did that well in it and so I thought if I could use it since I worked so hard on it then that would be great.

In hindsight I don’t think it’s the best idea I had. It’s an unrealistic work-load they give us. Essays and models and drawing take so long. The work-load is huge. The only reason I liked the year was that I met a girl called Kitty and we became best friends and we have helped each other through the year. There was an option for me to transfer out but I could only transfer in to Arts not Media Communications because my marks weren’t high enough.

I felt the difference between the first and second semester were like two different years of university. They could fail a student if you didn’t orientate your building north and if you missed that lecture you wouldn’t know to orientate it North. I thought university would be a doddle so didn’t bother going to many lectures in first semester but still did ok but now in second semester it has changed dramatically. The drop out rate is high, from a starting number of 180 students, in final year that is down to 30.

I don’t feel passionate at all about it. I feel that I always want what I can’t have.

Before university I partied hard and got drunk and went away a few times with different groups of friends. We didn’t go to the Gold Coast because I wasn’t eighteen and neither were many of my friends at that point. I hated having to lie about my age to get in to clubs and I hated the stress because I didn’t enjoy those places that much anyway and if I got knocked back my whole group would get knocked back. We went to Rosebud (Victoria) there wasn’t
any night life so we got to meet all the locals and we took lots of drugs and drank lots.

I decided to get a job during the summer after school as I was too young to go out to nightclubs and pubs so I thought working would give me something to do. My brother lined me up with a sales job at National Storage. I thought I was a pretty bad sales person as I just gave the customers the facts and didn’t like being pushy. I worked there every weekend during the year as well as I didn’t have any days off during the week, I had university every day. Some of my friends had two days off and that really p****ed me off.

**Carla Gottgens:** Did you apply for French as an elective for your degree?

**Eleanor:** (laughing) I am such an obsession loving person, I had French notes stuck all over my room during high school, I probably had Elijah wood on my wall as well? I am now obsessed with a group called Tripod (a rock band). I am going to Sydney to see them although they are Melbourne based. My friend Kitty loves them as well. I have to stay up all night long at least one day a week to get assignments done. I have seen far too many sunrises. We would go to bed at 4am and get up at 8am and continue working all day on the model (architectural model). I would rather die or break my thumbs than have to do this anymore. We would have a pile of cds that we would listen to over and over including some Tripod ones and we listened to them so many times that we knew all the words and felt we knew the guys and that they were our buddies helping us through. Thank god for Tripod or we would have died of boredom making architecture models.

**Carla Gottgens:** Where are you living at the moment?

**Eleanor:** I stopped living with my dad because there were only two rooms and my brother has decided to move in to my dad’s permanently. My oldest brother called Simon took over the house as my dad had moved back to his parent’s farm for a while as he suffers from chronic fatigue syndrome. I like living with my mum as my mum looks after me. When I work the money is just for me to use not to contribute to the house-hold expenses. I think my mum might get (government allowance) money on behalf of me.

My parents like me doing architecture, I think my dad really likes me doing it because he likes to live through me and he would have loved to have done cartooning or drawing but lacks the self confidence. I think my mum wants me to make money but is happy with what I am doing and my dad doesn’t really care about the money side. He would like me to keep doing it but not if it makes me unhappy. He thinks Kitty is a bad influence on me and that we egg each other on as to how much we hate the course. But I know that Kitty’s decisions are not going to affect me.

Kitty is quitting architecture. My parents would both like to see me continue doing it. I don’t mind taking a year off but I will stay in architecture. But if I did that I would be two years older than everyone. Kitty thinks it would be really
bad "like URGH... you will be two years older". And I am worried I would have lost my group of friends if I do that it would be hard.

I am really scared about the job prospects.

Carla Gottgens: Did you find it a relief turning eighteen?

Eleanor: I was more relaxed about everything and less stressed out about going out. I still go out with my old friends and I go and drink beer with the architecture students or after assignments are in. I think I might take a year off and travel together with Kitty. I had two very close friends from school who also went to Melbourne University. During the first year of university the two girls formed a close alliance excluding me, this really upset me for a very long time.

(Eleanor still mentions this three years later.)

Nellie and Kate and I planned to go overseas together but then they went without me and formed an even closer alliance excluding me.

Carla Gottgens: Do you think your wish to go traveling is to spite Nellie and Kate?

Eleanor: Sort of. I cried and felt betrayed when they announced they were going overseas. Kate said “Don’t expect any presents as we are spending all our money on ourselves.” I would love to go to Greece with Kitty, I don’t want to be in Melbourne when Kate and Nellie come back.

Carla Gottgens: How do you feel about the choice you made to study Architecture instead of Media and Communications?

Eleanor: I still think about what Media and Communications might have offered me, I would love to write but I think I have a romantic notion of what I can do as a journo (journalist). I would love to write for Monument (an Australian magazine) or an architecture magazine and be able to travel with it.

I have no dream, I constantly hear about people saying “follow your dream” but I don’t have one. This really bothers me.


Carla Gottgens: Has your Architecture degree improved, tell me how you are coping in your third year at university?

Eleanor: You have caught me at the worst time I could possibly feel about my course. I was averaging two hours sleep a night and doing it all week. And then on Friday when I was meant to hand an assignment in, it failed to render and the all the files were corrupted and I spent the whole day crying and wanted to leave but I am not going to give up.
Right now I have nothing I have a Bachelor of Planning and Design and next year I am meant to go to work in a firm for $6 an hour, a third of what I am getting at National Storage and then go back and re-enroll for a Bachelor of Architecture. It's crap. And then you can work as a s**t-kicker in a firm for two years, sit an exam and then be able to apply to become a registered Architect.

If I worked really hard at high school I could get good marks, but at university I kill myself, we all do, and I sometimes get no reward, I barely pass.

I went to a party and cried thinking about my future.

I sometimes find myself riding home from university at 4am in the morning as I use the university computer to do my rendering. And I ask what is my life now, all I do is work!

This whole thing of money is always hanging over my head, people keep telling me architects make no money.

At the moment I am just thinking finish this f**king degree and then I will see.”

I am with this guy called Dave. I was never a really long term girl. I have been with Dave for a year and a half and I realise why people have relationships, they are really good. He is really generous and spends lots of money when we are out. My father's health is pretty unstable so I don't tend to live there very much and my mum has just bought a new computer which I want to use.

Dave hates Kate and Nellie because they treated me so badly. Every time someone asked them how the trip was I would get up and leave the room. They are also into the whole gay drug scene and gay clubs that I don't connect with.

I got in to the rave scene with Dave. That was a real eye opening experience but we have toned that down a lot now. When I met him he had long hair, a tongue ring, an eye ring and a tattoo and that was very OH! for me. Then I found out he went to Trinity and I would say "you're not that bad you have no street cred". But now he's polished up with short hair and no earring. We did crazy things and second year was a blast I had so much fun, we would go out and have long weekend benders. And in second year I didn't work that hard and I did quite well so I can't work that out.

In terms of relationships I used to think that people in relationships were really lame, now I'm over that juvenile little opinion.

I see that my relationship won't last forever and is surprised when Dave thinks of us being together for the long haul. I think that when I have finished this degree I might go back and do something like Commerce. I think I have wasted three years doing this degree and I think it's a waste of money. Then
my dad will say life's long, do what you like. I want to see what life is like in an architectural firm and then decide. That journalism dream died. I do want to have a good job that pays and not scrabble around. My mum is a teacher and always complains about the money. It's not what I am doing that makes it bad it's who I am doing it with. I can work hard I have a pretty big work ethic, I put in the hours but I would love doing it with other motivated people with the same attitude. I just don't want to be doing something that is so hard and takes up so much time and not get anything for it, that is just b**l-s**t I realize.

Holidays my ass, they don't even exist we have so much to do. I work at university from Monday to Friday, I work at National Storage on Saturday and Sunday and then I'm back at university.

I just like the fact that I can get s**t faced on a Saturday night and come in here and throw up. I'm either hung up or doing home work on a Sunday. But when I didn't have the priority of doing homework I would just sit on the phone all day and call people up and chat. In terms of jobs I love it I wouldn't leave.

If I was a guy I would be a brick layer or a skilled laborer, they make s**t-loads (of money). Skilled trade is where it's at. I couldn't be a brick layer because I don't have the strength.

It's so annoying I was really beginning to love architecture at the beginning. I didn't really care about it I thought it was arty, slightly prosaic, it's got bits of everything. I would buy architecture books and borrow them because I loved them I was interested in them but when I think about what I do, I appreciate the architecture I just can't do it. It just p**ses me off and makes me upset. I can't think in three dimensions it is too hard. It's so hard, just imagine having a staircase where you are trying to design a room with a bit poking out and you have to connect the two and the service cord can't go there. And then if I do that it will block the northern light AAAAAARRGGHHHH. I just can't do it. You start going nuts.

I am hoping to work for the firm who gave me a mentor. I would love to work for Kirsten Thompson\(^{11}\) and a friend of my mum's knew her and gave me her number but I didn't phone her DURRRGGGGHHHH because I thought I would make my own decisions.


**Carla Gottgens:** Have you finished your architecture degree?

**Eleanor:** I have stuck with architecture, I did my one year of work placement and also studied overseas in Sweden for half a year (2007) to contribute to my Master of Architecture degree. Despite my attitude toward my own achievements in my degree, I was accepted in to the Masters year of

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\(^{11}\) Kirsten Thompson is an Australian Architect
architecture based on my higher than average marks. This was one extra year that the architecture students could undertake after their architecture degree if they had a high enough average. Half of my friends did not make the grade to get the Masters year.

**Carla Gottgens:** Where are you living now and what are you doing for work?

**Eleanor:** I have moved out of both of my parent’s homes and am living in a share house in Brunswick (Melbourne) with four other students. I tried to leave National Storage twice but I am still working there.

I had doubts all the way through about the architecture degree to the extent that I applied for Arts at the end of my first and second years of architecture but I just didn’t leave. I had a niggling doubt that it wasn’t going to work but felt that I should stick it out. But when I had my year out in work placement I had a really good project architect who mentored me and gave me some great ideas and jobs to do that weren’t just menial student jobs.

Despite having a great project architect during my internship other members of the firm gave a very poor account of being an architect, telling me I will never earn any money, etc etc. and again I thought of going back to university and doing law but realized it would be too late and didn’t want to study for a further five years.......blahhhhh. The firm didn’t have a very good ethos and had a large turn-over of staff. After my year there I decided to go on exchange to refresh my mind and get some overseas experience. The process of applying to an overseas university in Canada was extremely time consuming and involved a lot of paper work and portfolio presentations and essays. I decided to go traveling first before my transfer year started and purchased my flight to Canada prior to being accepted in to the placement. I was told while overseas traveling in Greece that my application had been declined as had all Melbourne University applicants to that particular university. Because of the amount of time it had taken to apply and the delay in hearing the response my chances of getting in to another university were very slim. Melbourne University suggested I apply for Sweden as the Masters courses there were all conducted in English. I was accepted within days with out having to produce hardly any paperwork. I felt very, very bitter about wasting the air ticket to Canada.

My time in Sweden was less stressful than my study time in Australia. My course there counts towards my degree but none of the students are graded so they don’t try very hard, or at least I didn’t. I found it a relief to be overseas and living by myself and enjoyed the party atmosphere that occurred in my accommodation in Stockholm where I was living in “corridors”, a dormitory style set up with one long corridor and lots of small rooms leading off the main corridor. There were many international students living there that I bonded with.

When I returned (from Sweden) I went straight into my second semester two days after getting back. I was full of beans to begin with and then had a really bad studio class during that semester and so felt really down. But it was
during that semester that I decided what I wanted to do and that was to stay in
the built environment but not necessarily in an architectural firm. I want to go
into sustainability consulting, because I never regained my confidence in the
artistic design element of architecture and I am constantly being put down and
criticized and critiqued by my tutors to the point that I don’t feel I have the
natural flair. But I don’t mind now because I realize I have flair in other areas.
And in the sustainability subject I realize I have more flair in science than in
architecture and got flying colours without putting in any effort whereas in
design I worked like crazy and nearly killed myself and only got average
marks, so I have decided to go with what I am good at.

I have one year of study to go and I’ve already started applying for graduate
jobs in the area of sustainability. I thought it might still be a bit hard as they
may look at people who have done work placement in the relevant field but if
it doesn’t work I will find work elsewhere. I am also thinking about going in to
the engineering sector, environmental engineering. I have considered getting
in there as an architect and then moving across. I’m open minded about it all,
I’m over the whole set career path, I’ve even applied for government jobs. I
feel that I have so much knowledge in this area that I want to use it.

I found that I now have a very strong contact with my old friends from school
more so than in my third and fourth years of university. I thought my ex-
boyfriend Dave may have been the reason for my losing touch with them as
he didn’t care for my friends or like them. Now I often find that I meet them in
the city and join in the crowd.

The ones that were really straight laced in school have really mellowed and
some are real party animals now. I can see a difference in how I act with
them than with my other friends, possibly because there is the history there
that they are comfortable being exactly who they are where as with my other
newer friends I feel that I’m a bit guarded and don’t want to be an idiot.

**Carla Gottgens:** You appear to be more relaxed in every way now than
when we met during the first few years of your university degree, would you
agree with that?

**Eleanor:** If I have to admit something I would say that MacRob’s instilled in
me the will to succeed and always get good marks and also get recognition
from authority which is quite an annoying thing. I always want to be graded
and I won’t be happy until I get a high mark whereas I would prefer to be
happy all the time for just being alive and well and moderately successful.
Once I realised that, I tried to care less, it has been going on for so many
years I find it hard to let it go. That’s why I liked my year of work placement, I
realized that my work was good enough even though it wasn’t amazingly
presented, it was what had to be done and I hadn’t had to spend all night
tweaking something in Photoshop\(^\text{12}\) it was ready for tender and then we could

\(^{12}\) Adobe Photoshop is an image editing computer software program
go and have a drink. It was much less subjective, no one was standing over my shoulder telling me I wasn’t good enough, I was good enough, I realised I was good enough even though I wasn’t the best in the class, I could do the job that I was trained to do. I will be relieved when I finish and no longer have to get graded. It reduces me to a number and I feel that I have been reduced to a number all my life from age four to twenty-three. I will always try to be the achiever. I don’t have the knack I don’t have the eye for design and this is something I need to move on from.

I think my mum is quite torn as she has a friend whose daughter, the same age as me is doing finance and is in the money field and is earning money. And sometimes I feel that I should be earning the money and doing what my mum would like me to do because her friend always brags about what her daughter is doing. Because I told her what the real deal with architecture was (the lack of money), and she said that is not very good. But at the end of the day I know my mum wants me to be happy and my dad is thrilled I am going to be an architect as he would have loved to do it. I guess I just won’t earn a lot of money, I just don’t have the drive for earning a lot of money. But I do have drive for sustainability. I don’t want to travel for an hour to work to do something I don’t love.

**Carla Gottgens:** Why did you choose to move out of either of your parent’s homes?

**Eleanor:** My dad’s illness is quite bad and I find it hard to cope with. Although our relationship is very close and we tell each other everything. Sometimes he is out of action for up to four days and I feel I am helpless and can’t do anything for him. I was also sick of living at home and wanted to move out.

I always work, and I have always been keenly aware of my parent’s financial situation which I would rather not be, I feel uncomfortable asking them for money and always have done. I never paid for food or board but contributed in other ways like paying for a handy man or buying some food. My mum really likes people living at home.

I entered another relationship after my break up with Dave. I think my anxiety and depression during my first years of university was possibly something to do with the amount of recreational drug use I indulged in during my relationship with Dave. Dave was a middle man when it came to drugs, he wasn’t a dealer but would supply drugs to friends and other people at parties. That sort of friend environment is not a healthy one with Dave in that position, if the friends he supplied to weren’t happy with their purchase, they would turn on Dave, there were a lot of transitional relationships and friendships that weren’t really real. Strange thing being able to look back on it when at the time I was in it, it was so hard to see. My other friends would never have dabbled in drugs, I didn’t get into it until I met Dave and I went “Wow” excitement, this is what they talk about when they talk about raves, this is so cool. I didn’t realize at the time there were lots of downfalls until later. Now I choose not to go out too much and now the drug of choice is social drinking.
James (her current boyfriend), is someone I went to University High School with in Year 7. I remember that we were both the subject of bullying back then and we were drawn together possibly due to that. I bumped in to him by accident during my university years and he happened to live not far from my mum’s place in Clifton Hill (Melbourne). I feel now that I have moved out to Brunswick (Melbourne) it is giving me a bit more breathing space in our relationship as we were living in each others pockets almost every day.

At the moment my inspiration comes from some of my sustainability lecturers although I am scared of asking them for advice until I know exactly what I want. My dad is a big influence in my life but he hasn’t always been. When I was little I never saw him as he was the big advertising man and then he left home when I was twelve and I only saw him every two weeks. But in the last ten years I can’t imagine not having him around, he is a pillar of support, he has been there always. When I went overseas there was a f**k-up with Centrelink, he went to the tribunal and fought for me so I could continue getting it (Government student support). And he was sick at the time. And when I had depression a few years ago I would call him and he would be there for me. I know my Mum would be p**sed off if she heard me say this as it would be like “what about me?”. My mum is supportive but in a motherly way. But dad is so pragmatic, he wouldn’t lie to make me feel better. Wouldn’t gloss over it. He would turn it into a positive to make me feel better.

Carla Gottgens: Tell me what you thought about the process of the project and how you saw yourself in context to the project?

Eleanor: I was worried that I would appear to be a low achiever and stagnator, still being at university after eight years and I was almost hoping that the project would end next year as I may be at my final destination. But then what is the final destination? I am glad I am out of home for the project. I feel the same or part of my personality is the same, being anxious, wanting to be validated through high grades. But at the same time I am much more self aware. And I know what makes me what I am.


Carla: Can you identify a moment over the past six years that you could look back on and identify as a period where you felt you had become an adult?

Eleanor: Hmmm a moment in the last 6 years... I guess it’s been a long

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13 Centrelink is the trading name of the Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency (CSDA) a statutory authority responsible for delivering human services on behalf of agencies of the Commonwealth Government of Australia. The majority of Centrelink’s services are the disbursement of social security payments. Centrelink delivers services primarily on behalf of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
process. Do I even feel like I’m in adulthood now? Not really =] I guess it comes with still being at university after so long. However I know that answer is neither here nor there so let me try and be a bit more specific for you. I think I changed my outlook on life quite significantly when I was traveling in 2006-7. I had a lot of setbacks and crazy situations which I had to deal with and I believe as I overcame each one I learned just how capable I could be if I just trusted my own abilities. When I came back to Melb I felt I no longer had to see the therapist I'd been seeing before I left, I was a lot more sure of myself. I think that's probably how I would define 'adulthood' at the moment. Of course I still behave like a crazy teenager sometimes (I'll never get tired of getting stupidly drunk with my friends), but my mindset is very different now compared to the 21 year old Eleanor.

Now for a quick update, I'm living in the house in Brunswick but in a bigger bedroom =], four housemates, all students, we have a great time. I'm just finishing the Masters in Sustainable Architecture (arghhhh so much homework), working 2 days a week at SKM as a Sustainability Consultant. Still with the boyfriend, he's called James and he's working at The Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe Uni, freelancing for SBS radio. In July I went to Kenya for a month with a group of fellow students to do some volunteer work, this is the blog with the details. The experience was absolutely incredible.

**Carla Gottgens:** Tell me how the SKM job came around, the last time we spoke you were applying for anything.

**Eleanor:** The SKM story...well I found out in about March that RMIT would be hosting a sustainable buildings conference in May. It cost $400 to attend, which I certainly didn't have to blow on a 2 day conference. My dad suggested that I could get a press pass to the conference if I offered to write an article about the conference for a student publication. So I contacted RMIT, asked them, they said YES! =D I was thrilled, went to the conference and met an ESD consultant from SKM (as well as many other industry professionals). We got along quite well and on the second day he asked if I was interested in working for them...if so I should come in for an interview. I did and the rest as they say is history. I'm on the grad program there, on an engineering wage which is just spectacular because as we know archies get paid rubbish and I was not really interested in practicing as an architect. The work is very challenging but I enjoy pushing myself and learning new things. This field is so new that everyday is incredibly exciting, I hope to continue at SKM for a few years and then re-assess where the industry is heading and whether I should move into another area of sustainable development. Possibly overseas aid...possibly more consulting. At the moment I do a lot of work with Green Star assessments, advising architects and engineers, energy audits, water audits and research. We often act as ESD consultants on large jobs, as well as doing a lot of work with schools and hospitals.

**Carla Gottgens:** You mentioned a few years ago about the ups and downs of drug use while you were with your boyfriend Dave. It also coincided with the
negative feelings that came through in our interviews regarding uni. Do you think the recreational drug use contributed to the Depression you sought counseling for?

**Eleanor:** Hmm the drugs may have contributed in a small way to my anxiety at the time, but they were far from the defining reason for my depression. In 2004 and 05 I was very confused about my life and career/future path at the time and that's mainly the reason I sought professional help. I was always worried about the future and making the wrong choices, I was fighting with my parents and had severe bouts of depression when I would lose motivation to do anything. I had a lot of anger about my parents splitting up and then relying on me emotionally when I was too young...and that came out thanks to therapy. So whilst at the time I was partying perhaps a little hard, there were many other reasons for my decision which dated back to my childhood. I was bullied in primary school and early high school and consequently always felt I had to impress people. Besides, I could usually tell when I was 'sad' because of a big weekend rather than sad due to underlying depression and anxiety. That university was very hard didn't help matters, I was sick of always being graded and feeling like if I got a bad mark I was worthless. I feel I've shaken those feelings now which is a relief! Of course they still exist and I don't enjoy getting bad grades, but I can deal with it and usually it just motivates me to work hard. =] I'm much more certain about the choices I make and have made, and I'm usually happy I made them.

Well there's the psychoanalysis for the day, I'm not sure how much of that info is useful to you, however I'd appreciate if you didn't quote me on all of it with the pics because my parents may be upset.

Carla Gottgens: Erin can you tell me a bit about yourself and your history?

Erin: I go to Princes Hill High School with Alex and Nisa. I am living in student accommodation housing in the city, my mum lives in Queensland, she moved there when I was fifteen.

I grew up in country Victoria until my mum met a guy over the internet and moved to Queensland to live with him. I wasn’t invited to go and I didn’t really want to go any way. I tried living with a friend’s family at first in the country but my independence didn’t sit well with my friend’s mother who had had her at a very young age and in my eyes was overly protective of her. I think my independence comes from often being left at home alone in the evening when my mum went to work. I felt I was old enough to cope with moving to Melbourne and attending school there so I did.

I have applied to go to a horse management course based in the country in south western Victoria. I am interested in doing sociology but I think I would be too slack to do normal course work. I don’t mind entering the horse management course and doing course work for that as it is something that I love to do and I have regular contact with horses anyway. I own thirteen horses spread all over the state. Some are active and others are retired horses grazing.

When I lived in the country I was an experienced snow board rider.


Carla Gottgens: Now that high school is finished what are you doing in terms of work and living arrangements?

Erin: I stopped going to high school two weeks before it finished, I didn’t see the point of working too hard when I had already been accepted into my horse management course.
I didn't have much spare time to socialise, I worked a lot of hours at McDonalds and also driving horse carriages in the city. I didn't have a boyfriend then but I did go out with a guy who smiled at me on the tram.

I am now living with a new boyfriend, Alex, and his family in inner northern Melbourne. I had had a bad experience in my last rental accommodation after my student housing finished. I was living with a guy who turned in to a psycho and I had to flee the house with my dog and no possessions. I was left with only a handful of personal items left over, like photo’s and some clothes when I moved in here (her current boyfriend’s house).

Then my relationship with Alex broke down, I moved to the country to start my horse management course. (This was the first time I lost contact with Erin, she tended to just up and leave places of stay without notice.) When I moved to the country to do my course I was living on campus. This lasted six months before I moved to a shared house and met a boy, Steven, and then moved in with his family on his farm near where I was studying. The farm was a dairy farm and he was being groomed to take over it. Before I finished my horse management course, I broke up with him and moved back to Melbourne. (During this period I again lost contact with Erin, I had planned to visit her in the country over a two day period and when I phoned her to finalise the trip her ex-boyfriend told me she had left.)


**Carla Gottgens:** Erin, it has been a year or two since I have seen you, we keep missing each other, can you back track and fill me in on what has happened to you over the past couple of years?

**Erin:** I moved back to Melbourne for a short period and then resumed my relationship with Steven albeit at a distance. We then broke up again as the relationship wasn’t very good. I moved into a share house in inner Melbourne and started working at International Race Horse transport (IRT). I did finish the year of my course but not all the work so I didn’t receive the actual diploma. I could do a few assignments and get a piece of paper but I don’t feel the need to.

My Nanna died in 2003. My dad passed away when I was little so I was very close to my Nanna. My Nanna left me some money and I used it to buy my first car. My first flight with my new job was to get to the airport and to go to quarantine and check the horses. On the way to the airport my clutch blew out and I had to phone my boss and tell him I had broken down. My boss told me he would appreciate it if I had a more reliable vehicle. So I decided to buy a 4W drive 'cos I was a horsey person and I needed something to pull horse floats. Steve was the salesperson who sold me the car. He was the reason I broke up with the other Steven from Glennormoston\(^\text{14}\). I ended up breaking up with the other Steven over the phone while he was on a three

\(^{14}\) Glennormoston is a town in south western Victoria where Erin attended her Horse Management diploma.
month trip taking a boat up to Queensland by water. But the new Steve made the break up a bit easier. I saw him a few times to test the car and realized I had a crush on him. We went on a few dates and it was very romantic. I found myself after only having the new car for a few weeks driving up to Mansfield where I grew up as my grandfather just died and I was driving back and my car blew up and because Steve and I had been on a few dates I got a new engine for free. And I got to drive his sports car for a few weeks. And then we started going out. He was twenty-three, I was twenty-two. He was living with his parents and he stayed with me a lot and then he moved in with me in a one bedroom unit in Moonee Ponds. I admit I am very good at moving and Steve isn't, we nearly break up every time we move.

I finished my job with IRT and started work with a similar firm but this involved actually flying with the horses as well as doing just the office administration and paper work. I moved out to a small unit on a horse stud on the outskirts of Melbourne near the airport.

I flew to Singapore and Malaysia mostly. It wasn't as glamorous as it sounds, but I got to sit with the pilot during take off and landing. It was a cargo plane and I would go and check on the horses and sedate them if they needed it. No-one would ever get to sit in the cockpit now unless they were in that position. I got paid really well and got a travel allowance. There would be other cargo like cars and fruit and sometimes boxes of condoms. But the experience of working for this new company had massive down sides as the woman who ran it was really psychotic, she was like the mother of my old boyfriend Alex who I lived with after Year 12 High School.

My new boss's wife was also psycho and I had been told but didn't listen as you only listen to things you want to listen to right? My male boss went overseas for a period and I was left with the his wife and it was awful. She was really controlling. Part of the issue was that my current boss used to work for IRT before starting his own business and as I used to work at IRT I had systems and methods that were effective but Sue, the wife, wouldn't let me use them as she had a vendetta against IRT. When my male boss went overseas my relationship with Sue got worse and then I got fired. But I had foreseen this as I had seen the letter that had been written to fire me on the computer prior to it being served to me so I had prepared myself and had already found another job.

I went to Flemington and rode track work while I was looking for another job. And then got a call from Alex who I used to drive horses for in the city. He had kept in touch with me while I was at university in the country and I had quite a good working relationship with him. He wanted someone to drive on Friday nights until Christmas and through summer. It paid really well and then the Commonwealth Games came and it was really busy and I worked two weeks straight 11 or 12 hours a day. And then the job kept going and it paid well so I kept doing it but the boss started getting quite nasty and not very friendly. But I was getting all of my debts paid off, my student loan and car and I was planning on paying off all my debts and getting a deposit for a house by the following April with the money I was earning. And then on the
16th June I had an accident. The horse carriage I was driving got hit by a drunk driver throwing me off my carriage, head first onto the road. I remember bits and pieces of the night but not much leading up to it. I had passengers at the time, the two passengers got whiplash but were positioned quite low down in the carriage. I was well above the horses, up high on a little stool and was flung forward. I think I fell on to the horses before hitting the road. I broke my teeth and I have had implants, I thought I was really lucky falling on the horses before hitting the road as this slightly softened the impact.

The drunk driver got out of his car and ran off, there was a foot pursuit with police but he had left his girlfriend in the car. I remember waking up on the side of the road and making a bit of noise, I was very shocked. I remember there were a group of people and they told me I had had an accident, I remember my phone ringing but couldn’t answer it as I was bleeding and had cut my ears, head, nose, mouth and above my eye. I handed my phone to a stranger to answer it and it was Steve on the phone, my new boyfriend, who was coming to meet me. Steve could hear someone screaming in the background and the guy told him that a girl had given him the phone and that she had just been in an accident. Steve thought it was someone having a joke as sometimes I would have drunken idiots in the carriage as passengers. But the guy convinced Steve what had happened. He rushed into town, the guy who had taken the phone was lovely.

I remember the other girl I used to drive with came up and told me that Alex was on his way and I was happy with that. And there was another woman who kept telling me to lie down. I had got myself into a sitting position and couldn’t move as I had dislocated my shoulder and had damaged my ankle. The woman told me she had done first aid, but I didn’t want to listen to her and gave her a few choice words. And then another carriage driver came up who was a bit of a nobody and I wasn’t in the mood for him so I gave him a few choice words as well. (We laugh at this as I point out that Erin was obviously speaking her mind and was selective in the advice she wanted to receive).

I remember lying in the ambulance and telling the ambo’s (ambulance personnel) I didn’t want to wear a neck brace and that my neck wasn’t broken. And they put it on and I wouldn’t let them so I threw a tantrum and they took it off. It is amazing what shock does to you, I swung from one mood to another. I remember refusing to let a nurse give me a tetanus shot, telling her that horses don’t have tetanus. I remember throwing up, being given laughing gas to enable injections to be given. I took the blood sucker off the nurse to get all the blood and crap out of my mouth as the nurse was annoying me when she was doing it. I remember really random weird things.

They took all the broken bits of bone out of my head. I had a blood clot or hemorrhage that they had to drain and afterwards my brain swelled up. In the first three weeks my brain function was very bad. I still have word finding problems and memory recall problems, I don’t have a problem storing information it’s just recalling it. My brain remembers things that I really care
about. I might struggle to find the word for chair even though I would know what it was. I can’t concentrate on more than one thing at a time. I had my jaw wired, teeth taken out and others put in, people looked for my teeth at the scene of the accident but most teeth were shoved up into my jaw. I had pins put in my feet, and a cement piece on my head where there was no bone.

I was in the hospital for six weeks and then in rehab (rehabilitation) for four weeks and then outpatients three times a week.

**Carla Gottgens:** Was the company you were working for covered by insurance for accidents?

**Erin:** It’s funny you should ask that, Alex (Erin’s employee who owned the horse carriages) and I no longer speak. He was very concerned for me straight after the accident and took himself to the doctors to be put on stress pills and he was really supportive to start with. He paid us cash when we worked for him and he obviously didn’t have work cover for any of his staff. I thought that was what he was more stressed about rather than me. I told Work Cover the truth as I couldn’t not tell them, because here I am I could buy a mansion in the middle of the city with all the money the surgery and treatments have cost. I haven’t had to pay any money as work cover pays for it all regardless of whether your employee pays for your work cover or not. I had to sign all these forms and Work Cover will probably try and get money back off Alex as he didn’t have insurance. And they will probably fine him a lot of money.

Alex became very nasty, I used to have my horses up at his place and he put locks on the gates so when I went to pick up the horses, I couldn’t get in because the gates were locked. I have probably lost a few thousand dollars in horse gear as my stuff was in his shed and he wouldn’t let me into it. I would have to meet him in the city as he wouldn’t meet me at the property so he wouldn’t give me all my gear. I broke in to his paddock to get my horses back.

Work Cover did pay Alex who was then meant to pay me during my rehabilitation but Alex would pay me by cheque and he was meant to send me a weekly payment. I would often wait three weeks for a payment and then the cheque would bounce. It took me nine months to get Work Cover to make me a direct payee and I went through so much stress over it. I would only get a fraction of what I was meant to be being paid and I was in a huge debt that I was trying to get out of.

After rehabilitation Steve and I decided to go for a holiday to America, we had been saving to go to Disneyland in America prior to the accident, but we hadn’t booked anything. Then it got to a point after my accident that I could start saving money as I went through a period where I wasn’t able to earn any money, and Steve paid a lot for me. We went to Disney land and New York. My foot didn’t like flying but my head was fine. I went to America and forgot my x-rays and letters from my doctors but I didn’t beep going through the x-ray machines. I have screws in my head as well as my feet.
Carla Gottgens: What did you do after rehabilitation for the accident?

Erin: I did a return to work course for twelve weeks. By that time I was working at a vet clinic where I was doing a return to work vet course and I loved it but vet nurses don’t get paid much. Then a pet store opened up next door to me and I started working there full time on a casual rate. They employed three of us on the pretence for one being made a manager. But the office girl had a boyfriend in head office and was made the manager and there wasn’t room for three strong people to work in the same role. Then I got offered a job being a sales representative for a pet food company and the current work people found out about it. The pet store let me go and accused me of not having initiative and using the phone and internet too much. But I gave them an earful. But I didn’t mind because I already had another job lined up with Flight Centre, so I took a few weeks off.

Carla Gottgens: So why the skip from the pet food company to Flight Centre?

Erin: I had applied for Flight Center a few years ago and hadn’t got an interview.

Steve and I had a big blue the other day, I said I don’t want to be here anymore, I want to get away from it all, it’s too much for me, I want to get out of everything, sell all my stuff and go and be a McLeod’s daughter or go to the US and work on a big ranch.

I really would have loved to have kept vet nursing, but the pay was only $15 an hour.

It is hard for me to find something I enjoy because I get bored and I get itchy feet. But I had a lot of time during my rehabilitation to identify what I really liked doing and identify what I do well that won’t get me bored and lazy, and I know Steve is the one.

I am enjoying my job with Flight Centre as I get to talk to people everyday and the goals and deadlines make it quite a stressful job so I don’t feel lazy. I get paid a retainer and commission on top of that. I get trained on the job and have only just entered the period where I can work to get paid commission. I am doing quite well this month but that doesn’t mean I will be doing well next month.

I feel comfortable with this and feel that this job is more suited to me than other jobs may have been.

I also did zoo keeping voluntarily after I had my accident, that was awesome, I loved it.

I am definitely the “grass is greener” type of person.
Carla Gottgens: Erin have you ever had any role models?

Erin: I think I found my role models after the accident and that was probably part of the healing process and how I was going to piece back my life and how much of the doctor’s advice I was going to listen to. I’m never allowed to ride horses again, but I do. I can’t do anything where I am at risk of hitting my head like riding a push bike, playing football, skiing.....

The doctors didn’t want to talk about it much after my accident when I queried them. There are high chances I might get permanent brain damage or epilepsy if I sustain another head injury.

Carla Gottgens: Erin, I met up with you a short time ago and you were competing in a horse gymkhana, how did you feel about horses after the accident and the news the doctor’s gave you?

Erin: That was the first competition I had been in since the accident. I ride every weekend and a few nights a week.

I sold my big scary thoroughbred. I didn’t think I would have problems with him until I got on after the accident and realized I had lost my confidence. So I bought another horse, shorter, fatter, older. I have come a long, long way since you saw me at that competition, I have progressed up two levels. There comes a point when they say you can’t do anything, so what am I going to do? Take up knitting?

So at that point I did probably find role models and people to talk to. When I was working a lot and traveling I had a Jack Russell dog who pined for me when I was away so I gave him away to someone on the Online Horse Forum. The forum people are fairly close knit. We get to know each other through gymkhana’s. When I had my accident the forum people put in all this money and bought me things for my horses, horse rugs and other equipment even though some were complete strangers. One woman called Robin who I had given my dog to bought the dog in to Melbourne when I was recovering to visit me. And then took me out to her place to give me a break from the hospital. Her husband died a few months ago and that was really sad, I haven’t spoken to her much recently but we did become very close.

Carla Gottgens: Could you identify a period over the past six years that you could say you had grown up?

Erin: There were points in time when I felt grownup, like when I bought my first car and became independent from the stupid boyfriend, but I wasn’t really. And then I bought my second car and I felt really grown up, then I got a new job like a career job and I felt grown up. But it was probably not until I had my accident that I had so much time to think about what I was doing in my life and what I wanted in my life. I had so much time to do nothing and work out money things etc.
Prior to the accident I wanted to become a vet nurse, buy a house with Steve, ride my horses, that was my goal. My goals are still similar......most days. I am never going to be a professional rider I sort of had to let that bit of my dream go. There are days I want to kill Steve and I am sick of not having enough money and I just want to pack up and go somewhere else. But we have talked about getting married but we won’t do that until my teeth get fixed. When we are feeling lovey-dovey towards each other there is no doubt in my mind that that is what is going to happen and we talk about it in depth.

**Carla Gottgens:** Are you still in contact with any of the people you went to High School with?

**Erin:** I am not in touch with the people from Princes Hill much as I was only there for a really short time. I would love to be in touch with Alex. I tend to stay in touch with friends over the internet. That is one thing that is hard about growing up when you move around so much; keeping in touch with friends. I’m not into clubbing or partying hard and getting drunk. We like to get together with another couple and we are like the awesome foursome. We go out to dinner a bit. I would rather have a bbq at home with people I like than a huge party. And I go out to the horses every weekend and Steve works every Saturday so I spend time with a close friend out at Werribee where I keep the horses.

Erin now works for Jet Pets an International pet transportation company. She is still with Steve who has recently become a policeman.
FEVEN


Carla Gottgens: Tell me a bit about your background, where you live, who you live with and what you plan on doing after school finishes?

Feven: I was born in Ethiopia, I have been in Australia for seven years and I live in Footscray (Melbourne) with my mother and my younger sister. I go to Footscray Community College.

I am unsure of what I want to study at university although I am very interested in getting into engineering at either Melbourne University or Monash University. I think the degree at Monash University is better and although it would take over an hour there and back every day, I am keen to get in. I might even be a doctor, I could transfer over once I have started at university, but I don't mind as long as whatever I choose to do involves contact with people.

My mum, my uncle and my grandfather are my role models. My uncle lives next door to me, but my grandfather passed away two years ago (1999). My mum, sister and I lived with my grandfather in Ethiopia prior to coming out to Australia. My mum and dad separated in Ethiopia. My uncle and aunt had suggested we move to Australia as the education and opportunities were much better than what we would expect to get in Ethiopia. I think my mum got married to an Australian to get citizenship, my family haven’t had any problems in staying here. My family are Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, I don’t personally go to church regularly especially during my last year of high school as I found it hard to wake up in time on a Sunday but I do go to the important festivals.

I would love to go back to visiting church regularly when I have finished year 12 because I love it. But at the moment I need to relax in my spare time or I will go crazy.

Carla Gottgens: What do you do socially?
Feven: I have a large group of friends from my high school we all hang out together and often play badminton after school. There might sometimes be fifty friends hanging out together.

Carla Gottgens: What are your expectations when you finish school?

Feven: I find my teachers are expecting me to do really well and get a really good score. I want to get at least 80, I heard that people from last year got at least 80 so now my friends and I want to aim higher than that.

I thought there might be pressure from my family but they tell me that I should just try as hard as I can and if I don’t get in to university that is ok. My male friends are also aiming high so are most of my friends and it has encouraged me a lot. We have fun competitions as to who can be the best. But I don’t like being competitive I prefer to work with people and just be a little competitive.

At the end of this year my school is having a combined formal and graduation. I am looking forward to it because my mother is very strict and doesn’t let me or my sister go out alone. No boyfriends, I am not allowed to have any boy friends.


Carla Gottgens: Tell me what university course you are doing?

Feven: I was offered a place at Monash University to study Telecommunications Engineering. I chose engineering as it was the same job my mum had in Ethiopia and she had a really good life there. My mum knew that studying that would prepare me for a really good job.

Carla Gottgens: What kind of job would you like to get at the end of it?

Feven: I think it’s like computer system engineering where they make communications programs for computer chips and electronics.

My mum works in a factory not in telecommunications here. At the start it was very depressing for my mum not to have her qualifications recognized here in Australia and she also struggled to find friends here as well.

Carla Gottgens: What did you do over the holidays before university started?

Feven: I stayed home and read lots of fiction books that I didn’t have time to read during the year. The books we had at school weren’t my choice of what I would normally like to read. I also socialized a lot.

Carla Gottgens: How do you find the course you are doing and the travel time?
Feven: I am the only female in my class and I find it a bit weird. There are only sixteen people doing the course, there is one other girl who is doing computer programming who shares some subjects with me. The travel to and from university is long and I find it hard to get motivated to go.

I got over 80 in my score, I think my school was happy with that. I decided not to transfer to medicine as my uncle had suggested because I really like engineering. I find the flexibility of being at university hard when it comes to being motivated to actually go, unlike high school where you had to be there. I don’t find some of the subjects relevant and can’t get my head around doing the work and getting motivated to do it. All the exams are written, I found it hard to begin with but I’m used to it now.

Carla Gottgens: Do you have a part time job while you are at university?

Feven: My mum supports me and my sister, I also get government assistance to study so I don’t have a part time job. My mum would prefer that I don’t work as it would take too much time out of my studying. I did want to work over the holidays in an area that was relevant to my study, I was thinking of an electronics shop or something like that.

Carla Gottgens: What do you do socially, are you still in contact with your school friends?

Feven: My mum is still strict about me having boyfriends. She sees that people change when they have boyfriends and don’t concentrate on their study and she doesn’t want to see me go through that. My group of friends is still similar to my school friends. I also have a social group at university made of Computer Systems and Telecom (Telecommunication Engineering) students but we don’t have much time during university although we do meet up over the holidays. At university I don’t eat lunch with the boys, I choose the girls to sit with, I have some other friends who go to Monash. At first I was only hanging out with the guys, my mum didn’t mind that if they were only friends, just as long as I didn’t date.

Carla Gottgens: How did you find the transition from High School to University?

Feven: University is a life changing experience as you realise that you are not a little kid any more and there is not someone older looking after you telling you that you must do certain things like they did in school or that your mum did.


Carla Gottgens: How do you celebrate Christmas as an Orthodox Christian?

Feven: My family and I are religiously devout, the big celebrations that take place on the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian calendar are very important to us. Leading up to Christmas, we fast and my mother takes away a luxury item,
this Christmas it's our beds. My sister and I have to sleep on the floor for a few weeks. It's like asking for forgiveness, having a luxury item taken away. We also don't eat anything from an animal, dairy products or meat.


**Carla Gottgens:** Tell me what happened after you finished your degree

**Feven:** I finished my degree and applied for a job at a company called Nearstar. I am working for them in Port Pirie in South Australia and next year I will be going to Tasmania to work for them as well. I really like moving around the country and getting to see the country, it's really exciting. It is about three hours drive from Adelaide. I work for a smelting company. For the first few weeks the company put me up and then I had to find accommodation for myself.

**Carla Gottgens:** What did your mum think about you moving interstate to work?

**Feven:** She went through different feelings about it, at first she would say that it was fine and good and it would be a good experience for me to see the country and then towards the time I was going to leave she would say no don't go, it's not important to do this. But at the moment she is good about it. I talk to her when I wake up in the morning and at night when I go to sleep and in the middle of the day at lunchtime. It's like they (her mum and sister) are there with me.

Everyone was very surprised when I said I was going and they asked if my mum would let me.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you feel independent?

**Feven:** Yes I do, it's funny I lived with my mum until now and now I am on my own. The first day I was crying all day and didn't think I could do it but I am used to it now. And talking to them everyday is like having them right next to me.

**Carla Gottgens:** Did you do many domestic duties when you lived with your mum?

**Feven:** When I lived with my mum, my sister and I didn't do much at all except for the school holidays we would sometimes help out. My mum would do everything, the cooking, shopping, cleaning.

**Carla Gottgens:** Did it feel like you were thrown in the deep end having to buy groceries and cook and clean for yourself?

**Feven:** Yes it did. I don't live alone now, but I did at first. When my mum cooked she made sure my sister and I would sit and watch her, so it wasn't like I didn't know how to boil a kettle. Sometimes I will phone her to remind
me how to cook something if I can’t remember what goes in it or what to do next.

My flat mate is a boy at the moment. My mum doesn’t care. He is also an electrical engineer at the place I work. I am the graduate electrical engineer. We are given three months to go around with the plant electricians to see what they do. There are different sections in the plant, copper and lead refineries for example so different electricians work in different areas. It helps us understand later on how to plan work around the electrician’s work.

We are designers for electrical systems, we can’t actually change a light, that is for the electrician. We design it and tell the electricians to do it. We have orange overalls and respirators, the first day I thought I was like Darth Vader. Now we are just following the other engineers around and seeing what they do but in a few months we will be doing it ourselves so that might be a bit more stressful.

Carla Gottgens: Did you have a passion when you were at university?

Feven: Not really, I was doing telecommunications engineering but I wanted to see what the power and electrical engineering might be like so this job is giving me a good range of experience because that is what I am now doing. I graduate (graduation ceremony) at the end of May but I really want to come back to Melbourne to work, I really miss my friends in Melbourne. But Port Pirie (South Australia) is really friendly, everyone is really nice, they say hello randomly even if you don’t know them, that is unlike Melbourne. But I feel that I miss my friends.

On Friday nights the graduates all go out and we go out for dinner. I don’t drink alcohol. I just don’t like it. On my 21st Birthday my uncle said drink, but I said I don’t like it and he said it’s ok we won’t get angry at you and I thought wow I didn’t think you would get angry either. No-one really in our group at high school were into drinking.

I don’t have a boyfriend, I didn’t have one in Melbourne either. I wanted to focus on my study which was driving me crazy.

Carla Gottgens: What is your goal for when you finish your graduate placement?

Feven: I want to move back to Melbourne and hopefully stay with the company I am with at the moment as it would be a bit rude to have been with them for my graduate years and then not work for them. They have a Melbourne office. And hopefully I will get in to a management position. And I would like to get married, that would make mum happy. She would like me to get married in a few years time, she said you have finished your course what else are you waiting for? She wouldn’t mind what nationality of boyfriend I chose but it would matter what religion he was.

15 A fictitious character off the movie series Star Wars
Carla Gottgens: Would it matter to you?

Feven: Yes I guess so, he would at least have to be Christian because we are strict orthodox in a sense.

For orthodox Easter we eat a lot, we go to church on Saturday night it starts about 7 or 8 o’clock and finishes at about 3 in the morning. We can either sit or stand what ever we choose, we listen to readings and do lots of singing they have a choir there. The service is in Amharic\textsuperscript{16}. The crowd is really big, everyone shows up. We come home and break our fast. My mum is fasting at the moment, I used to but it’s a bit hard at the moment with my work. And then we go to sleep. Then we go to my grandmas’ house and have a big feast on the Sunday.

Carla Gottgens: Was there a major influence in how you made the decisions that put you where you are today?

Feven: My mum and my sister give me lots of support, my sister is my best friend so she influences a lot of my decisions. My mum is a definite role model for me she is very strong, a very strong woman.

Carla Gottgens: Throughout the project what would be a defining moment of growing up for you?

Feven: That’s weird, as soon as we finished high school and went to uni we didn’t have our teachers telling us what to do, and I felt that this is different. And the crowd at uni were different and different age groups so I felt that I had to be grown up. And now I feel that I am older that I have finished uni.

I only applied for a few companies after uni. My sister was looking for jobs for me for some reason and she said go for it. This is my first job in my life other than my vacation placements.

Carla Gottgens: How did you feel about the process of the project.

Feven: I kept thinking every time I saw you how much I had changed. I realise that I look different and how much I have changed.

\textsuperscript{16} One of the languages of Ethiopia

Carla Gottgens: Can you start by telling me about yourself and explaining the youth movement that we have met through?

Katie: I live with my parents in Melbourne, I have one older brother who no longer lives at home. I go to a private mixed school. I tend to hang out with some friends from the Hashy movement, it’s a Jewish youth program. I became involved in Hashy through a friend at school and went on a summer camp held by Hashy, which I really loved. I had never met anyone so tight knit and friendly before. I had come from a really unfriendly school (King David School). It was really small and everyone knew everyone else’s business. Because I wasn’t like the stereotypical girl at my school it was a bit hard for me. So I kept going to the youth group until my parents started finding out what the ideology behind the youth group was about. My parents are Jewish Zionists, but Hashy is more secular.

Carla Gottgens: How religious would you consider yourself and your family?

Katie: I no longer attend synagogue, I didn’t find it as fulfilling as Hashy. Hashy is very left wing, my parents don’t like me going to protests, thinking I will get hurt, they are very over-protective. But they recognise it is better than me being in a right wing movement at least. That is the little upside. My parents hang in the middle. They are fairly religious they go to a synagogue where everyone sits together. My parents go to synagogue a lot but I don’t think they actually think about what they are doing. At Hashy we sit down and discuss what its about.

I want to go to Israel on the Hashy program but depending on what the situation is in the Middle East I may choose to go to Byron Bay for a few months and then start Media Communications at Melbourne or an Arts degree at Monash. I would like to get into a film course after finishing my degree and get enough money to travel and make small documentaries.

My parents don’t want me to go to Israel because they only see what the news gives them and watch the Jewish news which is worse where they are
told that Israel is under attack rather than getting the actual news off people living there. My parents didn’t trust the program and they attended a meeting with Hashy where they were given booklets about the program. My father said it reminded him of his time on kibbutz and said he wanted me to go, so that gave my a boost of confidence. Now I don’t know whether I want to go and if I will get anything out of it because of the conflict. I am worried about the safety and realise that I’m not getting the whole story from the media as they all have their own agendas.

**Carla Gottgens:** What did you want to do after High School or after returning from the youth program in Israel if you go?

**Katie:** My mother and father want me to do law, my father is a lawyer my mother is a psychologist. They have finally become content with my decision to do Media Communications, the rest of my family is in the media industry, my uncle is a film producer. If I don’t get into Media Communications I will go for Arts\(^{17}\) at Monash and study a media section in that plus Anthropology and Sociology and Cultural Studies so that afterwards I could do a film course and then the documentaries.

**Carla Gottgens:** What is your social life like and what friends do you spend more time with, school friends or Hashy friends?

**Katie:** I align myself more with my Hashy friends than my school friends. I don’t find my school friends very genuine I find them manipulative and very cliquey. I moved to my current school in year nine after being at a school where there were only sixteen girls in my year I went from there to one of the largest private schools in Melbourne. I figured that it being such a big school there would eventually be someone who I could click with, I have my place now. It was such a great change for me.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you have any role models?

**Katie:** I look up to my Hashy leaders who have returned from the program but I wouldn’t call them role models. They all seem so knowledgeable and could discuss anything. I have envied them for a while which is why I am so adamant about going over there. I agree with the Dalai Lama and Gandhi’s ideologies and what they did to change society. But I wouldn’t aspire to be like them, I don’t think that is possible.

I have been watching the Discovery Channel and National Geographic for years, this inspires me to go traveling. I don’t want to be in the same place ever again I want to keep exploring myself and myself with-in the world and the world. As soon as I get the time and the money I will be off and will not look back.


\(^{17}\) Bachelor of Arts
Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me what you did over the school holidays after Year 12 finished?

Katie: I went to Byron Bay and Sydney to bum around. I also went to Los Angeles and Florida on a cruise with my grandma who is eighty. I was the youngest on the cruise with the main age group being over sixty-five but I felt that I got to know my grandmother a lot better and realized what an amazing woman she is.

My grandmother warned me not to pack any clothes with safety pins in them. She thinks I dress down.

When I returned to Melbourne, I started working with my uncle at his film studio working on a TV show called Wicked Science. I was doing an assistant producer job and I got to sit in on the editing. I felt terrible because I had kids from VCA\textsuperscript{18} serving me coffee.

I only got an entrance score of 88.55, I was hoping for 90 to get into Melbourne Arts. But I realise that my effort leading up to the exams wasn’t great. I think I probably did quite well considering I only worked around twenty minutes a week and then eight hours a day in the lead up to the exams, “last minute” is my middle name.

Carla Gottgens: What are your plans with the Hashy group?

Katie: I have deferred my Monash Arts degree until I return from Israel, I have been offered another job in Port Douglas through my uncle’s connections, for when I get back from Israel but I’m tossing it up. I have spoken to other people in the industry and they tell my they regret not going to university to have something to fall back on rather than just going in to the film industry and working up from there. So I will hopefully major in cinema studies and then head towards the editing side of things. I don’t know if I want to be an editor but I know I want to be in the industry. Watching set production I see this major family that I would like to experience at least once and see where I fit in the most.

Carla Gottgens: You are two weeks away from going to Israel, how do you feel now about the safety issues?

Katie: I was worried before about the safety issues but now I’m not. I know I will regret not doing it if I don’t go. I am more nervous than my parents. I thought they always wanted me to go but it wasn’t the right time for them. I am leaving my grandfather who is not in a great state, he is very fragile. He was in a documentary called Long Shadows about the holocaust on SBS. He is eighty-three or thereabouts and has survived a triple heart bypass (surgery). I think my parents are glad I stayed for six months and grew up a

\textsuperscript{18}VCA, Victorian College of the Arts. Katie implies that the students from VCA would have had more experience and technical knowledge than herself but being the niece of the producer she is given a better role.
bit before I went to Israel. I have now made money and I am proud of myself, I went shopping for clothes with my mum and my mum offered to buy them for me but I was able to pay for them myself. My mum was surprised and I think she is proud of me for being independent since school finished. My mum is neurotic she is a psychologist.

My dad up until now has taken a back seat in the Israel thing. He appeared to be very interested in it, behind the façade he does really care about me but doesn’t really show it. Until he gets the facts he is against most things, he is a lawyer. He is not particularly supportive of the stance of my youth group. He thinks it is a bit foolish and to some extent I agree. He might have had the same ideologies when he was young but now he has grown up and his ideals have changed. But he did the kibbutz trip when he was twenty three and he loved it.

I would love to travel around the world and make documentaries. My love is the film Baraka, an interpretive film with no words. I think that might be the climax of my career eventually. I want to discover places not a lot of other people have gone.

I want to educate people more about different cultures. Working on the children’s show has taught me that is important. Not patronizing children but giving them something more accessible. Something they can be connected with.

Going to work I have learnt more over the past four months of working than I did during all of high school. I feel that I have grown up a lot and hopefully this is the next step, putting myself to the test being outside of Australia. I plan to go traveling around Europe for two months after kibbutz. I am going from extreme heat to extreme cold in Europe.


(When Katie returned from Israel I lost contact with her, for reasons described later in her story. Katie was still close friends with Danya, who was able to put me in contact with her.)

Carla Gottgens: Can you describe what you experienced when you arrived in Israel on the youth group?

Katie: When I arrived in Israel I wasn’t too surprised at the closeness to war I experienced. I put it down to having been brought up Zionist at Zionist schools with a Zionist family background. People often get surprises when I tell them I worked on a communal farm in the middle of a war zone. All of my Israeli friends while I was in Israel were eighteen and in conscription. They were going to and from the army base to the kibbutz and they would have AK47’s and M16’s over their shoulders. They sleep with them under their mattresses. I slept on a few M16’s ashamedly. There were 5 tanks in our potato field in Gaza and we would hear the tanks move around at night and go rat-a-tat-tat. Some people didn’t analise it as much as I did.
When I left the kibbutz I went traveling to London for a short time and I couldn't sleep as I couldn't hear the (gun) noises, it was too quiet.

Arriving at the kibbutz half way into the year meant that I had missed out on the study of Jewish issues and religion in Israel we were meant to do to be able to lead the youth movement when I got back. I did teach a group of year nines in my first year of coming back and there was something really special about teaching something important beyond schooling. It's all about being able to teach kids stuff that they wouldn't learn elsewhere. They (the Hashy organisers) gave me a role way beyond what I was capable of, or I may have been capable of it but I didn't think I was. I was supposed to be the head of Years 6, 7 and 8 and I was supposed to be in charge of all of them without another leader. I already felt below the other leaders as I hadn't done the first 6 months and I was at university and I wanted to commit myself to university and I told them I couldn't do it without help. They told me this was the best they could do it's this or nothing so I said well it will have to be nothing. I parted on interesting terms with the movement, I have offered to help whenever I can but they have never asked me back on camps or anything.

I was quite resentful as I gave them a lot of my time but the freedom from not being involved with the movement was great because I could get a lot more accomplished with the extra time.

I am about to finish a double major in Anthropology and Film Studies. My thesis idea is exploring cultural expressions through creative means. I plan finishing my undergrad then taking a year off and then doing my thesis.

My immediate plans are to save money and go back to the Middle East, travel around North Africa, Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt and Jordan. I'm looking at doing an intern ship or service along the way.

I am very keen on photography and have started dabbling a lot more. While I was away a close friend also from Hashy who I went to Israel with, was teaching me photography while he was learning it. I picked his brains for tips and have become a lot more capable over the years and bought herself a camera and started doing projects. I've just finished a street art project, very underground and illegal, can't disclose the location of the project. They are images of the local area and then stuck up in the local area with liquid nails as a transient exhibition. The next one takes inspiration from the French photo artist who crosses cultural and class boundaries. It is based on not everyone is as different as they seem. We are taking portraits of lots of people, and putting them up in street spaces.

**Carla Gottgens:** What are your living arrangements?

**Katie:** I am still living at home after experiencing living out of home for three months in an apartment in a block that my mum inherited but has now sold. I moved in with a girl who was quite selfish, we were very good friends but I think I had blinkers on as I was so excited to move out and I didn't really think
about who I was moving in with. It happened towards the end of a two year relationship I was having with a guy and my life was a bit of a shambles. So when we broke up I moved back home, my parents have a house in Gippsland that they spend a lot of time in so I am at home a lot more on my own. I would love to move out for the fun of it but I want to save as much money as possible to go overseas.

I have enormous respect for my grandmother who I went on the cruise with. I initially was a bit scared of her but now I see her as a woman who has been through so much and speaks her mind. My younger cousins have the same fear of her that I once had and I hope that they become old enough before she dies to realize that she is amazing.

When I was on the cruise with her I would hang out with the ship hands who were all around twenty-five (I was only 19) and we would hang out at midnight.

**Carla Gottgens:** Tell me about the relationship you mentioned earlier.

**Katie:** During my two year relationship I was completely in love and lost my mind because all I wanted to do was make him happy. He broke up with me and I was devastated for about a week and I came to my senses and realized I was better off and had more fun being myself. Then we became friends and he wanted to get back together and I said no that can’t happen and he was very stubborn and couldn’t accept it.

The whole concept of what I am going to do frightens me beyond belief. I don’t know what I am going to do beyond the next couple of years. I would love to make documentaries and am trying to start up a documentary at the moment on a guy called John Rushe. But my family contacts in the field tell me that Sydney is the best place to be and I don’t want to move to Sydney. I would love to work across the world like programming for National Geographic Channel or Discovery Channel. Also along the lines of curatorial art gallery stuff. At the moment I don’t have a clear vision but want to do something that makes me happy. But this place makes me happy.¹⁹.

This shop is a furniture retail store that uses recycled timbers from third world countries. The concept is that the store pays a fair price for the timber or furniture to help support third world communities. My dad is the lawyer for the company which is how I got my job here. I am now assistant manager by default as everyone got promoted so I did as well. The other staff don’t know the connection between my dad and the CEO, the CEO would prefer it to be that way so that the employees don’t think it’s favouritism. I get more respect working for this store than I did in my old job as a sandwich hand in a family owned deli. And now I’m doing paper work and budgeting and other cool stuff.

¹⁹ Katie refers to the shop, Villa and Hut, she is working in which is where the interview is taking place after hours.
**Carla Gottgens:** Can you identify a period in the past six years when you feel that you changed from being a teenager to an adult?

**Katie:** I think I always liked to think of myself as still a kid, and when I was fifteen everyone thought I was really mature for my age and I was always friends with the older kids. But now I feel that I am still seventeen and in the same mindset of a seventeen year old. But over the past year I feel I have matured in myself, I used to put people on pedestals constantly, if someone was better looking than me or more talented. And now I realize that I do have my talents and my faults as well. And I used to follow other kids around at school who I thought were great. I would try and make myself feel great as well through my connection with them. I did that in Israel as well but not as much as it was a freeing experience. And then when I got back and was in a relationship I did the same thing and didn’t have much breathing space of my own and just followed him around and wanted to justify myself through things he did and let go of some of my close friends just to be with him. In the past year I realized that I am worthy of people and shouldn’t put people on pedestals. I never had role models before but now I have, it’s my mum who is an incredible woman, she is a clinical psychologist and we talk about her patients confidentially and she asks me my opinion on certain things, she is really into Freud. And is beginning to respect my opinion.

My parents want me to marry a nice Jewish boy, my father since I was 12 wanted me to do law, they did the same to my brother and they still bring it in to conversation now but they are beginning to realize that I am doing something I really want. They put emphasis on money and that money is the essence of survival, as bad as that sounds it’s reality and that’s the way they see it.

I come from a fairly wealthy family and they don’t want to see me having less than I have now which I’m prepared for as I am not going to earn a lawyers salary that’s pretty obvious. I do pretty much support myself now, I couldn’t before when I was at university I was only earning $200 a week, but now I earn more and can pay my way more.

**Carla Gottgens:** How will you support your traveling overseas at the end of the year?

**Katie:** My brother takes as much as he can from my parents but they don’t give him as much as they give me and it makes me anxious. I would prefer to do it myself and ask them if I really needed to. My parents paid for my brother’s flight overseas so they expect to also pay for mine but I feel uncomfortable asking and accepting the money.

**Carla Gottgens:** There is another girl (Priyanka) in the project who went traveling, I am curious as a comparison to know how much money you think you would need to sustain traveling over a number of months.
Katie: I haven’t really thought about it. I hope to save around eight to ten thousand (dollars) and I want to have emergency money in case I can’t find a youth hostel for the night and won’t have to worry about the price of a hotel.

Carla Gottgens: Katie we lost contact for a number of years throughout this project from your choice, can you explain why you decided to come back to the project?

Katie: I was up last night thinking about the project, I thought shit I have been really complacent and that doing this project was really a burden and what could I possibly say to you that you haven’t heard from some one else. And after the first couple of years and realizing that I wanted to do documentaries and follow people around like you have, I realise I would hate for people to do that to me (what I did to you). And I think it’s really interesting and I’m looking forward to what will come out of it at the end.

Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me what your inspiration was for getting into documentary making?

Katie: I bought a really old book from Camberwell Markets when I was in Year 11, High School, and I knew that I wanted to explore cultures other than what Australia had to offer and at that time I thought I wanted to explore what I thought were dying cultures and preservation which is not as simple as it sounds. The book was my inspiration. I always loved National Geographic mags and documentaries. And I think Hashy helped....

I don’t practice Judaism but I have a close affinity with the culture and I feel a strong connection to it. Whenever I get a Jewish boyfriend I tell my mum and my mum gets a look of glee in her eye. I don’t believe in one nation ruling another. I talk to my anarchist friends and I don’t believe that a nation needs to exist and that people shouldn’t be allowed to inhabit a place.

I don’t agree with the politics of Israel but I have a strong connection with Israel from having lived there and knowing the language and not just for me but for everyone else in the world. I hope there is someone one day who will rise up and just make it work. There are lots of peaceniks who have become tired and jaded and they say fucking Arabs and it is understandable that they are tired of the fighting and just want it over with.

Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me about your family and yourself?

Linda: I was born in East Timor. I live with my family in a house in a new development in the outer suburbs of Melbourne called Delahay. There are twelve of us living in the one house, my mother and father, four brothers, one sister, brother-in-law and sister-in-law and two newborn babies.

My family speak a Chinese dialect from East Timor. My cousins and I studied Mandarin at a Chinese school at the level of grade one. My cousins and I were about fifteen and we were surrounded by six year olds who would often out do us in assignments and the home work we were given in Mandarin.

Carla Gottgens: Where do you go to high school and what are your plans for next year?

Linda: I go to Footscray Community College (Melbourne). I would like to apply for nursing or midwifery. My family are asylum seekers which prevents me from going to university as an Australian. I would have had to attend as a foreign student so I would have to pay the full fee price for a university education. Because of this, I can only afford to attend TAFE college. My family’s application for citizenship is seven years old. The government are very slow at processing asylum seeker applications.

Carla Gottgens: As an asylum seeker you wouldn’t be eligible for the Government Youth allowance, do you work part time?

Linda: I work part time during high school at McDonalds. I help support myself and my family through my part time job, so do my brothers and sisters.

Carla Gottgens: Do you have any role models?

Linda: I don’t have any specific role models but I admire people who help others. I spend a lot of time with my family,
Carla Gottgens: What is your social life like?

Linda: I move in the same circle as Feven we have a huge group of friends. I have known Feven since I came to Australia about seven years ago, she would probably be my best friend. I hang around with my cousins a lot. My parents won’t allow me to have a boyfriend, they would kill me, they want me to study first.

Carla Gottgens: What would your goal be for the end of the year when you have finished High School?

Linda: I change my mind what my dream job would be, anything and everything, I think teaching might be good……


Carla Gottgens: Tell me what course you are studying now that you have finished high school and what differences you find between high school and TAFE.

Linda: I started studying pathology at RMIT TAFE. I like the course but the difference is huge between higher education and high school. We are expected to be self motivated and follow things up ourselves and not be spoon fed information.

Carla Gottgens: Are you still working part time?

Linda: I am still working part time but I’m at an ice-cream shop now at High Point\(^{20}\), it’s in the same complex where I was working at McDonalds. My father is teaching me to drive and he often picks me up after work to practice parking and driving around the shopping centre car park.

Carla Gottgens: You mentioned your family had written to the Migration Minister regarding the status of your family’s asylum seeker application, can you tell me what happened with that?

Linda: The minister wrote to us to get a medical check up and now we are waiting to hear back.

Carla Gottgens: Now that you have finished high school, what do you do socially and have your parents changed their views regarding boyfriends?

Linda: My parents have relaxed a bit in respect to boyfriends, because my brother had a girlfriend so they realised I could have one as well. They still want me to be interested in my studies and not get side tracked by boyfriends. I really don’t know what I want to do but I am keeping my options open and I hope to get a good job. The course I am doing goes for two years and gears me towards being a lab technician. I want to get a good job.

\(^{20}\) High Point is a large shopping centre located in Melbourne.

Carla Gottgens: Are you still studying at RMIT?

Linda: I am still studying pathology at RMIT but I am thinking of changing it. I started a new job working at Crown casino, where some of my cousins work. I didn’t find that it interfered with my study that much as I was able to dictate what hours and shifts I was able to work.

Carla Gottgens: When I spoke to you last year you mentioned you found the difference between high school and TAFE huge and getting motivated was quite difficult, do you still feel like that?

Linda: I found being at TAFE a lot easier once I got used to it. I was used to working in groups at high school and was getting used to working on my own and getting things done. It wasn’t too hard, there was a lot of work, it was neither hard nor easy. My marks were ok in my first year but not great. I didn’t tell my parents what my score was, they normally wouldn’t ask how I was going, if I was still doing it they figured it must be ok.

I started studying Spanish part time as well as doing my normal study. I am saving up to travel....I really wanted to do something different. My pathology course is due to finish at the end of next year.

Carla Gottgens: How do you find living with lots of people in the house now that you are working and studying?

Linda: I am still living with my parents, sometimes it’s really hard and very noisy because of the young babies.

Carla Gottgens: Were there any mile stones that happened to you in the past year?

Linda: I got my license but it was a full eight months before my father let my drive solo, although it was his car I was driving around. I get to work with my brother who has a car and we co-ordinate shifts so we can get a lift home with each other.

My family finally got approval for their citizenship status. My older sister who is married with a young baby applied independently from the rest of my family and they are still waiting on approval. Because they are not approved yet, they don’t get Medicare, it makes it very hard and very expensive especially having a small baby.

Carla Gottgens: Did your family find it much of a difference once they got citizenship approval?

Linda: Not really, but it was a relief not having to continuously get the paperwork checked every six months. Getting the paper work continuously
extended was a hassle for my mum as she would have to take time off work
to go and get paperwork signed and submitted and often her children needed
her to be present when getting official paperwork done due to their asylum
status.

Carla Gottgens: What is your social life like now that you are working late
nights at Crown Casino?

Linda: It's not so bad I tend to go out with my cousins a lot, I don't have a
boyfriend, I can't win. I don't want anything more than being friends or
anything to ruin the friendship. I don't feel that I am ready for it. Nothing
much has happened just schoolwork, I think I lead a really boring life.


Carla Gottgens: Are you still studying at RMIT?

Linda: I switched from my pathology course to a Marketing Degree once I
had citizenship. I have now applied for International Studies at both RMIT
and Victoria University but I have deferred both acceptances. I am interested
in studying international trade and hopefully doing business overseas. I
stopped doing pathology because I felt I had no real interest in it and no
interest in being in a lab all the time. If I had completed it, I would have had to
study for another seven years to qualify as a pathologist.

My part time work at Crown didn't go anywhere, there were promises of a
managerial position but it never happened so I left. I then started working at
CGU insurance as a customer relations officer. I just sit all day, it's not like
Crown where I was on my feet running backwards and forwards constantly. If
there is nothing to do at work I play computer games or chat on the phone or
read the news. I deferred because I thought something would come of the
Crown job and I wanted to see how that went. Now I am working full time and
saving my money to go overseas. I would like to study overseas I got a taste
for travel when I went to Thailand with my family, there were fifteen of us.

Carla Gottgens: Could you identify a period where you felt you had grown
up?

Linda: I felt I had grown up when I started working and started paying my own
school fees and buying my own books and taking responsibility for myself. I
also help pay my parent's mortgage. I give them around $400 every month,
the house is like a share house in that everyone pays their way.

Carla Gottgens: What would you like to do with your study?

Linda: I am trying to sort out what I want to do, I want to work full time and
study part time to get my International Business Degree. But I want to save
and travel again.
Hopefully by next year I would like to travel and work overseas if I can save up the money. I am thinking of North America or Canada.

**Carla Gottgens:** What was the reason for your change in study, and what inspired you to change?

**Linda:** My parents inspired me to go into the International Business course. My father is a chef and they have always inspired me to do well and to give myself options. I was thinking that in the future I might want to open a business and I like going overseas so I might combine the both. I would prefer to study at RMIT as Victoria University is a bit laid back. But then I am not sure, and it doesn’t really matter as long as I get what I am after.


At the current moment I am back to school, doing International Business at RMIT doing it full time. I was working full time at the same time at one stage, but due to the timetable for school, I am now doing only part time work at CGU insurance. I have now worked there for over a year doing customer service.

I have been offered a scholarship to go to China for 3 months to study Chinese. One of my elective courses. The trip will take place around Feb 2009.

I think the transition into adulthood was when I was 18 or 19 and working at Crown Casino. When I was offered to become the team leader that is when I needed to make more decisions and to take charge and be able to tell people what to do and also knowing about the budget of the restaurants and what are the ways to control it so that we met the budget. At the same time being able to take control of my life and looking at where I want to be for my future.

At the current moment I am not seeing anyone, but I was seeing somebody previously for about six months, but it didn't work out.
NISA


Carla Gottgens: Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself.

Nisa: I live with my mother in a flat above a shop in inner northern Melbourne. My parents are separated and my father lives in Perth. I am an only child, I go to a local public high school with Alex and Erin (also in this project).

Carla Gottgens: What would you like to do when you finish high school?

Nisa: I want to be a writer of teenage books. I started writing in 2000 and I have written 32,348 words. I want to put off doing any further education until at least 2004 to continue with my writing. I am not interested in any other form of education, if so it would have to be something to do with creative writing but I can’t think of any thing at the moment.

I don’t like having to make a decision for things so far in advance, like making university preferences, or if I am taking a date to the formal two months away. My mum will be happy as long as I do something and don’t sit around for the next couple of years. I plan to live here until I am twenty-five.

Carla Gottgens: Is writing something you would like to do indefinitely?

Nisa: I can see myself being a writer for the rest of my life, I am interested in fantasy, that is what my book is about.

Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me what your book is about?

Nisa: There are four main characters, they each have their own special thing they bring to the group they draw it from the four points of the compass. Each represents a point of the compass and they have to save the world from an evil character who wants to destroy everything, the trees imprisoned the evil character thousands of years ago but the trees are peaceful so they can’t destroy him, so this group of four can only destroy him. A guy was watching over the evil guy on behalf of the trees, this guy is immortal but over the years has been corrupted by the prisoner. The servant can come and go and is slowly destroying things around him on behalf of the evil guy so the evil guy
can eventually escape. Lady luck and Lady Fate are essential to the world's survival. If he can capture them he can destroy everything.

**Carla Gottgens:** Can you tell me about your relationship with your mum and dad?

**Nisa:** Both my parents were artists and so I have been brought up in an artistic environment. I feel I am destined to be a struggling artist working in a record store because that is what both my parents have done. My father did art more as a hobby but still exhibited widely. He didn’t make much money from his art, he made pieces for his friends and then gave it to them. He gave a lot of stuff away. My mother is a practicing artist working in the photographic field. I am also studying photography in Year 12, I am in an exhibition at my school and my work has also been chosen to be shown at Top Arts at the Ian Potter Gallery\(^\text{21}\) after school finishes.

As a graduation present my mum has bought me a tattoo, in time for the school formal.

**Carla Gottgens:** What do you do in your spare time?

**Nisa:** I sit in my room a lot, I read, write, listen to music, go out with friends to parties. My closest friend Alice lives in Perth we are like sisters I have known her since birth. At school Alex is one of my best friends but I don’t hang out with her that much, I don’t hang out with many of my year 12 friends much because they are all so year 12 and they scare me, they do all these grown up things. I have a lot of Year 11 friends.


**Carla Gottgens:** What did you do after school finished?

**Nisa:** Over the summer holidays I went to visit my father in Perth. I was hoping to spend a lot of time with my close friend Alice but Alice’s circle of friends has changed and she has started using drugs. I just felt Alice was living in a very different world from me. I developed a closeness with another friend named Jess and I ended up spending most of my holidays with Jess.

(Nisa appears to be quite upset about the change in her relationship with Alice.)

When I returned to Melbourne I started working at a near-by restaurant. I also started having health problems with my knee and I ended up in hospital. I have a lot of illnesses relating to my kidneys, my mother thinks it’s because I don’t dress appropriately, you know, wearing mid drift tops when it’s cold. My relationship with her is deteriorating, I decided to move in with my new boyfriend, Frank, he went to my school. I tried to act as though me and my

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\(^{21}\) Top Arts is an annual art exhibition showcasing recently graduated Year 12 students from Victorian High Schools. The exhibition is held at the Ian Potter Gallery in Melbourne, Australia.
mum were just house mates but then it would just turn into fighting on a major basis.

I want to be an adult and I want to do certain things but mum still has rules like housekeeping and I want to do chores in my own time and not when my mum tells me to. I am really good at house work now that I have moved out of home, don’t tell my mum this.

**Carla Gottgens:** What has happened with your plans to write your book?

**Nisa:** I have just finished doing three writing courses at CAE. The first one I did was a one day course on how to write a successful novel synopsis. The second one I did was a fantasy writing course and every night I would come home and I would have so many ideas, but I never had time to write them but I had so many ideas. After the four week course we all exchanged numbers and have formed a writing group. But I missed the first one because I was so busy. But I did meet them for a drink and only three turned up and we are going to meet in January.

I have also just finished an advanced novel workshop, I was the youngest there, most of the students were in their 30’s or late 30’s. I was interested to see how many people would like my writing but they seemed to enjoy it. There was an opinionated man in the class who had an opinion on everything and I thought if anyone is not going to like it, it will be him and I got back a handout that he had made notes on my work on and at the end he wrote “I really enjoyed this”. So I came out thinking WOW so many people are going to enjoy this. I felt like I needed a really, really big change before I could sit down and start writing again. My mum has turned my old room into a study and I am welcome to go back and use it if I need the space.

**Carla Gottgens:** So have you kept writing?

**Nisa:** Making money got in the way of me continuing writing, my goal to get it to an editable first draft by the end of the year didn’t happen.

I would like to get my novel to 50 or 100 thousand words.

**Carla Gottgens:** What are you plans for Christmas, will you spend it together with your mum and Frank and his mum?

**Nisa:** Frank and I are planning on traveling to Queensland to see his family in Townsville. I’m not sure who I am going to spend Christmas day with as my mum will just sit around the house saying "I'm bored, why aren't the shops open?". I don’t think we will have a combined Christmas with my mum and Frank’s mum, they don’t get along. Mum feels that Frank’s mum is difficult and unhappy and Frank’s mum feels the same about my mum.

**Carla Gottgens:** What has happened with your health problems surrounding your knee?
**Nisa:** I have been in touch with an orthopedic surgeon regarding my knee problem, they feel that they may need to do some investigative surgery.

**Carla Gottgens:** Have you been back in touch with Alice since you last saw her?

**Nisa:** No, I don’t like the crowd she is running with and what she is in to.

**Carla Gottgens:** What are your job ideas now that you haven’t continued writing?

**Nisa:** I am thinking of getting in to modeling and I applied at some agencies but nothing has come from it. I think I might like to get in to child care as I love baby sitting.

**Carla Gottgens:** What are some of the big things that have happened to you this year?

**Nisa:** Getting a job was a major milestone for me, getting to six months in a relationship was another big thing. I feel this year has just gone. I don’t want to study in the university environment. The thought of study seems too much at the moment, Year 12 took it out of me and I never want to talk about study or school again.

My social life is pretty slow, when I do have the time to meet up with people I don’t have the money. My short term goals are buying Christmas presents and long term I would like to start working on my novel again and move my writing stuff over to Frank’s. Next year I want to save money so I can go on holiday instead of just spending it all the time on everything. I get a youth allowance at the moment but this is affected by the fact that I am living with Frank. We are classified as living in a de-facto relationship. Frank works in security.


**Carla Gottgens:** Fill me in on what you have been up to over the last year.

**Nisa:** I broke up with Frank and I started studying a Child Care Diploma at TAFE. I started another relationship with a guy called Edwin and I celebrated my twenty first birthday. My father came over from Perth to my party. I didn’t completely finish my Child Care Diploma but instead started doing agency work in the child care field at various Child Care centres. I have also moved back home with mum. One child care centre started employing me on a casual basis and then I became full time with them.

I am waiting to buy myself a laptop with my tax return and then I hope this will get me back in to writing. I still want to do photography and I have an idea for an exhibition, inspired by the 2005 tsunami. I thought of using buildings and water and the fragile state of buildings. Just an idea not sure I will get around
to it any time soon. I haven't put aside my artistic plans but at the moment I really enjoy working in child care but I can't see myself doing it forever.

I wouldn't have thought about being in childcare when I was at school as I wouldn't have thought about it as anything more than baby sitting. I thought by the time I turned 23 I would be working casually and doing writing.

**Carla Gottgens:** Are you still in touch with any of your friends from high school?

**Nisa:** I still see Alex but no-one else really. I was disappointed at first that my old school friends weren't interested in making the effort and that I was the only one making the effort.

**Carla Gottgens:** What happened to your relationship with Edwin?

**Nisa:** I wasn't happy about it, he was possibly my first boyfriend that I could see myself with for a long time and I don't think I will ever get over him. I was living with my mum at the time. Then there was Charlie, who was one of my last flat mates. I lived with Zara who I met from work at the child care centre and that's how I met Charlie. I moved in and found the two of them (Zara and Charlie) very difficult to live with. My relationship with Charlie lasted a week. He had anger problems and other issues. I would come home and would have to have a full on conversation with him or he would think there was something wrong. Zara would tell my I had to be really nice to him as he had really low self esteem. He was 33. It's not really my problem if he has really low self esteem. And Zara was really messy. I came home and the house was a mess and I was cleaning up and doing my washing and Charlie came home yelling at me and called me all sorts of horrible names. I locked myself in my room and called a friend from work who came and picked me up and took me back to my mums as my mum was away at the time. And then one of my friends helped me move my stuff that weekend. I lived at my mums for a few weeks and then moved in with Alex from school.

Then I started a relationship with an English backpacker I met at a friend's party. Barry. He was living in Sydney at the time and went home and packed up his stuff and moved to Melbourne. He was living with me as he didn't currently have a job, he was planning on going back to Sydney later in the year as his sister was coming over from the UK. We will see how it goes. He is almost 30, I am 23.

**Carla Gottgens:** How is your relationship with your mum now?

**Nisa:** We are getting on a lot better now, since moving back in with her after finishing with Frank, our relationship improved but it definitely gets better when I am not living there. I find it interesting living with my mum as there are all these rules as to what I can and cannot do and how things should be done.
I realize I will never be able to repay her for anything she has done for me. She is my best friend, she is my rock she is my everything.

My mum was diagnosed with breast cancer. I changed my perspective on a few things like letting things go now rather than getting worked up about them. I think I appreciate her a lot more now as I she is not going to be around for ever which was a very hard thing to come to terms with. I think as I get older it is easier to get along with her and she enjoys my company a lot more rather than just having to put up with me.

I am going to stay at the childcare centre for at least two or three years and save my money. When I get my lap top I will start writing again but I don’t have a time frame on that. I would like to go overseas to England or America and do nannying for a year. And travel around a bit after that. Probably a five year plan at the moment. Work can get very bitchy as it’s a work place full of women. And I don’t get along well with some of them. But I really love what I do there and working with the children in the 2-3 age group room and I have a lot of fun at work. I can go to work in a bad mood and then have a really fun day and come out thinking wow I had a great day. I am grateful that I have found something I really enjoy doing.


**Carla Gottgens:** Can you identify a moment over the past six years during the project where you felt you had become an adult?

**Nisa:** I don’t think I can pinpoint a moment where I’ve felt like I’ve made the transition into adulthood but when I look back to when I was in high school I can see how far I’ve come and how much I’ve grown and that makes me feel like I’ve made the transition. I’m still living in Station St. Coburg with Alex and Dave, I’m seeing one of my next door neighbours, his name’s Mal, I’m working agency Child Care, doing casual work at a centre in Moonee Ponds and working at a cattery a couple of days a week. I’ve also just had knee surgery again on Thursday, had a cyst removed, was only supposed to be day surgery but ended up staying for two nights because of the pain, only got home today and still in a lot of pain.
PRIYANKA


Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me a bit about you and your family and your history?

Priyanka: I live with my parents and my younger brother. I was born in India and my family moved to Australia when I was six. We live in a suburb in outer north west Melbourne. This is a new suburb that has a lot of new streets. We have lived here since I was in Year 4 our house was the only one in the street but now it has built up to an enormous sprawling suburb.

I go to McRobertson Girls High School near the city. My parents drive me to the station and then it’s a train and tram ride to school. I want to study either business, marketing or management but definitely business at RMIT. I was the only person in my group of friends at school interested in business, most of my peers were more science oriented.

My school has high expectations of their students, I believe that they gear the students towards high level occupations in medicine and law. Since Year 10, I have done a lot of extra curricular business related subjects and work experience in the business field. On average I do at least three extra curricular business activities a year to help shape my future in business studies. In Year 10 I did a week of Business Life and Certificate for a small business practice. In year 11 I did Young Achievement Australia and employment training where I went to the Department of Treasury and Finance to help them out with a problem and produce a solution. This year I did the Australian Business Week from Deakin University. My first preference for university is RMIT as they have a degree where students complete a year of work placement. But I also want to combine marketing with management and at the moment RMIT only offer these as separate courses.

I have a lot of friends outside of my school that I went to high school and primary school with before I started at MacRob’s. Because I live so far out of the city I don’t like going in on the weekends because I do it every day of the week. On school holidays I don’t meet any of my school friends. I don’t have many close friends with my school friends.
In year 9 I was geared up to do music, but my mother warned me that I wouldn’t make any money out of music. I also suffered from extreme stage fright, but I have now moved away from music. Other than the music warning my parents said I can do whatever. My mother used to be a potter in India exhibiting her work. Since they have lived in Australia she hasn’t practiced as she has had no facilities, but she would like to get back in to it.

I work at the same tutoring place where I was tutored to get into MacRobertson Girls Grammar. I prepare Year 8 students for scholarship exams to get into the private schools. I sat the entrance exams for scholarships to get into Melbourne Girls Grammar, Academy of Mary Immaculate, Penley and Essendon Grammar, Caulfield Grammar and MacRobertson Girls Grammar. I was accepted to Penley and Essendon Grammar, Academy of Mary Immaculate and MacRobertson Girls Grammar. My parents wanted me to get into MacRobertson's Girls Grammar but I didn’t want to go I was happy where I was but they pushed me to do that.

My brother is trying to move schools but the Catholic regional college has said no to him because he is not Catholic. My parents went to schools with nuns teaching them so my family doesn’t have a problem with Catholics.

**Carla Gottgens**: What would your dream job be seeing you are very business oriented?

**Priyanka**: My dream job would be the CEO of BHP, BHP were the sponsors of Young Achievers week so we got to meet the then current CEO of BHP during that week. When I was there we made a book on drug dependency using stories from drug addicts. The book was a success and is distributed through most high schools in Australia. I recognise that I have had some good opportunities with the groups I have been in as they have all been really hard working.

**Carla Gottgens**: Do you have a boyfriend?

**Priyanka**: I have a boyfriend but my parents don’t know about it. They probably wouldn’t mind if I was serious but not if it is just a passing thing. I have other male friends who my parents don’t mind I have because they are just friends. I have never broached the subject about boys and I won’t unless I am serious because they wouldn’t approve. I thought being Indian they could be a lot stricter than they are, I have friends who are not allowed to sleep over at friend’s places and one who was not allowed to go to the Melbourne High Formal.²²


**Carla Gottgens**: Can you tell me what university course you got into?

²² Melbourne High School is the male equivalent to MacRobertson Girls Grammar
Priyanka: I have started a Bachelor of Business and Marketing at RMIT. My entrance score was 93.9, I was very pleased with that as I hadn’t studied until the night before but I was also eager to get over 90 as no-one at MacRobertson Girls Grammar gets under 90. I felt that I should have taken a bit more time off, everyone had told me university was easy so I took it easy to begin with and then realised I had a lot of work to do after a few weeks and frantically tried to catch up. The freedom of university is not good for me because I feel that if I don’t need to go to a lecture one day then I won’t. I would sleep in until 10am and then say it is too late to go in and too far so I won’t bother.

My parents are happy with the choice I made. I have made some friends at RMIT, at the beginning we went out a lot but now the work load is heavier and we don’t do that as much. I have friends who live close to me that I see more, but I don’t catch up with old school friends as they live on the other side of Melbourne.

Carla Gottgens: Are you working part time?

Priyanka: I work part time at Novotel Hotel stacking the bar fridges.

I feel more liberated that I can drive a car now, I use my mother’s car and go out when I want to. The house rules have become tighter, my parents tell me I can only go out one night a week, and they want me home by 3am, which only gives me two hours at a club as they don’t open until 11pm.

I still have the same boyfriend Luis, for the past 11 months, my parents like him, I didn’t tell them about him they just found out, but they like him. He is Portuguese, my parents believe we are only friends.

Melbourne high and the private Catholic schools won’t take my brother on scholarship as he is sporty not academic. He has an admission to CBC Christian Brothers College next year. Cricket is his strength and his life, we can’t go away during the holidays because that might interrupt his cricket season. He plays for Carlton D grade he’s 15 years old. He didn’t have a very good season last summer.

I don’t know what type of profession I want to get in to in the marketing field. I would like to be in advertising but on the non artistic side of it more on the pitching side of things.

I think I will have to re-do a course next semester. I don’t see why I need to do accounting when I am studying marketing unless I am to start up my own business in which case I will hire an accountant.


Carla Gottgens: You are now in your second year of university, how are you finding it?
Priyanka: I am finding university a lot more stressful. Applying for co-op jobs was worrying me as I didn’t think my marks were high enough, the competition was tough getting into a company that would take me for a co-op year, they tended to pick those students with higher grades even if you did pass everything. I failed my first subject in my life, accounting, that really bugged me. I have now joined in a whole lot more to do with university like the business students association as I was finding it hard to get motivated or interested to go and now I have extra motivation in my extra curricular activities. I was bothered to go to university and sit there for two hours every day if I had no friends there. The lectures were so boring and I wanted more of an incentive to go. I would sit in a lecture hall with 600 other people and would fall asleep. (Commercial Law) so I needed to find something extra to keep me there. I tailored my classes so that I could fit them in to just two days as I was finding it hard to justify travelling so far for just a two hour lecture.

After moving my subjects around I found I was then spending the other three days doing work for the business students association, in marketing and event co-ordination, which included fundraising. I knew I wouldn’t like doing events coordination so made them know that I only wanted to do it as an interim job for the association. I wanted to do marketing but found there were too many people wanting to be in charge and changing everything I did, I realized it was a big problem in voluntary student organizations. I went on to sit on a portfolio board as a student representative instead.

I was disappointed when I got to uni, the business studies part of RMIT is separate from the main part of RMIT, I felt really cut off from the main campus, cut off from all the clubs available which is why I wanted to get involved in the BSA (business students association).

I love “The Apprentice” (Donald Trump’s reality show), I feel it is very much up my alley. I know so much of what they are doing and how they work their projects and getting ideas about what should and shouldn’t be done.

I hate university but I have to do it to get in to marketing. I hate the theory based part of it and the heavy weight put on exams. I love research projects but I just hate studying for exams, I always have. I can’t understand how to apply all of the theory to practice. I wanted more practical applications to marketing. My study capacity is low, I love doing reports. I can’t see the point of sitting in a lecture and cramming two hours of theory that I will forget in six months. I also hate group assignments where you can’t control how much other people are putting in.

Carla Gottgens: How has your social life changed?

Priyanka: Still my closest group is around where I live. My university friends are university specific but not outside of university hours as I live too far away. I am finding it even harder to go to university now relying on public transport, I crashed my mum’s car, falling asleep at the wheel after cramming in too much university and work. I wasn’t hurt from the accident but it taught me a lesson.
Carla Gottgens: Is Luis still your boyfriend?

Priyanka: Yes it is now two years, my parents still don’t know, I think they know but I haven’t actually said he is my boyfriend. He is a graphic designer.


Carla Gottgens: A few years have passed since we have met, how were the last years of your degree?

Priyanka: My university days are almost over and I am obviously very, very happy about this.

I deferred my last semester to go traveling. My grades hadn’t been great, I realized that I wasn’t going to enjoy university, so I put my effort into working full time to get experience.

If I’m not going to enjoy it I am not going to put effort into it. So I have compensated by working in marketing during my university degree, and I have set up a job with ANZ’s graduate program for next year. My mum works for ANZ bank and she told me I should apply as they are really good to work for.

Even though my marks hadn’t been great I think I put myself ahead of my peers as I had the work experience where my peers hadn’t. It’s hard to find graduate marketing positions so I was lucky with ANZ and went for the position anyway even though it wasn’t marketing as they didn’t have any at that time. They offered me a new marketing position that had come up while I was in the interview. So I got lucky. It’s geared to getting a job with them after the 18 months which is what I would like to do. I look at the long term plan, I want to travel again after I finish my last university exam, because I won’t have the opportunity to travel once I start working if I am accepted to work for ANZ after the graduate position ends in eighteen months. Money has become a bit of an issue but I am positive. I have saved money since I was fifteen and I spent it on my trip overseas last year.

Carla Gottgens: What kind of work experience have you been doing to supplement your study?

Priyanka: I had worked in a marketing position for Tech Roads up until I went on my overseas trip and then came back and worked for Lexus in a marketing position but I had to cut back my hours as the university workload was too heavy.

Carla Gottgens: Tell me about your overseas trip.

Priyanka: I went traveling with a university friend and three other girls who were my friend’s friends. Their travel plan was to decide on a week by week basis. The three other girls left after a few weeks and then my other friend left and I traveled on my own for the last month. I found it a bit hard on my own, I
was tired and was moving every four days and found it too much of an effort to make friends.

There was no back pack on my back but I did stay in youth hostels. The other girls had back packs. The only time this was an issue was when we had to run for a train. After carrying the MacRob school bag my back is gone. I didn’t consider a back pack. I wanted to do the budget hotels to begin with but changed my mind after experiencing my first hostel. I swore by a website called hostel world and you could see feedback from other guests as to which hostel was good or not.

(Priyanka laughs when I point out that is the sort of marketing training she has done that she prides herself in.)

I didn’t think it was that expensive but I had saved a lot of money all up it cost $15,000 including flights. I didn’t have to scrounge at all.

**Carla Gottgens:** Was travel the reason you had saved the money since you were fifteen?

**Priyanka:** No, my parents had always told me I had to save my money. I had always wanted to travel and hadn’t really thought of it as the goal for the money. A few months before going I was going to use the money to put a deposit on a house but then the better offer came up.

I have to watch my saving now. My parents have brought me up to be independent and to value money. I have had to pay my own phone bills and the upkeep of my car. I had saved for a car and my parents ended up buying me a car as I hadn’t cost them any money. My roof over my head is always going to be covered and food, but clothes and general entertainment is my responsibility.

I sometimes do too much for my body to handle and I had two jobs and was studying and fell asleep on the wheel at 4pm in the afternoon. I have learnt a lesson and now if I am tired I won’t drive. It was bumper to bumper so I was driving slow, crawling.

I stopped working in the hotel stacking fridges after the accident and then went to work for Tech Roads a road safety company.

I think I was lucky in that I knew exactly what I wanted to do and did it and haven’t changed that thought at all. I have found some other subjects like graphic design and public relations that I picked up along the way that I wouldn’t have envisaged. The only difference is to maybe go in to communications or media but in a marketing role. I still can’t draw something but I know what works.

**Carla Gottgens:** You live at home with your parents and now adult brother, how are the family dynamics?
**Priyanka:** I get along with my brother who also lives at home. We often go out together on the weekend which is a bit strange. My parents really like it.

I kept my boyfriend Luis quiet from my parents but I have now broken up with him. We didn’t announce it but I knew they knew. It was assumed but wasn’t said that he was my boyfriend. You don’t tend to introduce until you know it’s serious enough, at least in our Indian family. He was Portuguese but that isn’t an issue with my mum and dad. I would never say someone was my boyfriend unless I knew it was heading in a particular direction. I haven’t had a boyfriend in two years so I think it will happen a lot quicker for them to meet him when it happens but I will still only call him a friend. My ex-boyfriend used to come over to family gatherings. My cousin likes the Aussie Western culture and her family count that she has bought four guys in the last two years to meet them. Why are you introducing everyone to us when you have had four? Just be sure before you introduce. Other older cousins have married in the last few years and you wouldn’t get to meet the partner at all until right before they would be married. They have all married people of other religions so we get to have two weddings.

**Carla Gottgens:** Why did you break up with Luis?

**Priyanka:** We were too young. We realized that after two years we were still only nineteen, that felt really young. I think I am too picky when it comes to guys.

I enjoyed being single but now I would like to have another boyfriend. My parents never spoke to me about sex education due to their cultural background. My mum found out I was sexually active and she didn’t cope with it at all very well. It’s not that she expected me to wait until I was married but thought it might not happen until I was at least 22 or 23. They left India when the old values were still very much in place and were given an eye opener with the western style when they came to Australia, although my parents would be classified as non strict and fairly progressive from an Indian perspective. My mum doesn’t understand that the generation has changed and she would have died if she knew what me and my younger cousin got up to when we visited India a few years ago, staying up all hours, drinking and enjoying all sorts of things. In contrast to other Indian families here, my parents are very, very liberal but they may be because they were considered rebels when they were young. They have adopted the Australian culture well.

I don’t see myself as a religious person but I do celebrate the traditions that come out of religious festivals like the Festival of Light in India, which I hope to go to. (The Indian version or Hindu version of Australian Christian culture in celebrating Christmas and Easter). I enjoy the family being together and lighting all the candles around the house, it is like celebrating Christmas but not exchanging gifts.

When I was younger my parents dressed up as Santa and did it because everyone else did, but now they don’t celebrate it at all.
We do exchange gifts at Chevalli (The Festival of Light). I hope to go to India in November for the festival but my parents have started building a new house and are living in a small rental house at the moment until it’s built. We designed the new house as a family as we will all be living there. My parents have taken in to account that the two of us will live with them, it’s a given. In India you wouldn’t move out until you are married. I am sure that I will move out with a boyfriend before I get married though. But I see it that if we aren’t having a problem and we are happy to live together then I will put my money towards a house of my own.

**Carla Gottgens:** Now that you have spent your savings how do you plan to finance another trip overseas before you start working?

**Priyanka:** I haven't started saving as I wasn’t planning on going traveling so soon but I have six months to kill and will be paid really well come the start of the year. $52,000 as a graduate at ANZ well above the base salary of $38,000.

I didn’t want to stop working as I found it more enjoyable than doing uni. All I wanted to do was get a piece of paper. All I need to do is pass my last exam, I don’t want to get a high mark. I don’t like university at all, I would have chosen not to go to university but I needed a degree.

My dad works as an IT person for the tax office.

My materialistic viewpoint has toned down a lot now. My view of everything has changed over the past few years. When I was younger I wanted to be a millionaire but when you get a little older your ideals change and the money doesn’t seem so important and I’d like to have a nice family and a nice job. My mum is still brilliant don’t get me wrong but I still don’t think I know what I want at the moment apart from being career focused now and thinking of other options and things and money isn’t as important or isn’t so important as it was.


**Carla Gottgens:** The last time we met your family were preparing to move in to their new house and you were about to start your graduate placement position at ANZ. Can you describe how all that went?

**Priyanka:** At the moment, I am still enjoying working at ANZ, the graduate program is coming to a close and the year has been amazingly rewarding in terms of work. The friends I've made have also meant that the year has been a constant buzz!

I'm still at home but we all moved into my parents new house, which is lovely-huge, but lovely, but its getting to the stage where its time to move out, for no other reason than the location isn't as good. No
opportunity for mid-week pub sessions and coffee dates! I now seem not only to be 1/2 an hour away from the city, but also 1/2 an hour away from the area I grew up, and hence my close friends. No boyfriend, but work and friends are keeping me busy enough! But I’m looking forward to summer and a holiday to India at the end of the year with my family and some friends for my cousin’s wedding. Also, making plans to work overseas next year is keeping me motivated enough!

In terms of identifying a moment or period where I made a transition into adulthood? I’m not sure that realising it actually happened. I think I always considered myself to be older (or more mature) than I was and therefore, I might have completely missed that moment where there was a transition! It’s possible, starting work at Techroad or traveling to Europe (2006) may have been it, but at the time I felt that I already could handle that, so it’s not like I felt I’d made a transition.
SHAYNA


Carla Gottgens: Shayna can you start by telling me about yourself, your family and where you go to school?

Shayna: I live with my mum and my younger brother. My parents are divorced and I have one older sister with two children. I live in a caravan in the garden of my mother’s house, my mum didn’t realize there wasn’t room for me when she rented the house so she bought a caravan for me to live in. My caravan gets really cold.

I go to a public school with Zoe (also in this project). I went to a Steiner school up until Year 10 then I left to attend a regular public school.

My goal is to study Music Therapy at Melbourne University, but I want to go traveling to Europe first.

Carla Gottgens: What is music therapy?

Shayna: I don’t really know, but I know that I want to do it. When I was little my father worked at a psyche hospital and I knew there were music therapists there and decided that sounded pretty cool. I think music therapy is used to help people who are mentally damaged.

My friends from school are planning on going around Australia in a bus after school finishes I would like to join them for a year and then go to university.

Carla Gottgens: Tell me about your musical interests?

Shayna: I played in an orchestra before but I didn’t like it, it is so competitive even just school orchestras, it isn’t how I view the violin, I think it doesn’t matter what level you are at with it but how much you like it.

Carla Gottgens: I understand you went to Europe but had to come back earlier than expected, can you tell me what happened?

Shayna: I went to Europe for a very short time but I had to return as my boyfriend, Sasha’s, brother was very ill with leukemia. He had had a bad course of treatment and had been put in intensive care, he is now in remission. Sasha had paid for me to go to Europe, our plan was to go for a year working in any country we could find work in.

I have returned to high school where I am studying Year 11 mathematics to improve my entrance score for university.

My goal for the year is to get a job but I am failing miserably. I want to do bar work as I did a short course prior to going to England and I think it will be fun. I am planning on going back to Europe but will apply for university and then defer. I got 67 which wasn’t high enough to get into music therapy but I was given special consideration.

Carla Gottgens: Why were you given special consideration?

Shayna: I had three people die during my exam period at the end of year 12. My nanna died and on the last day of school we had a big party and two boys drove home and smashed in to a pole and died. That was hard to deal with, I didn’t know them that well but I was getting to know them.

Carla Gottgens: What do you need to get into music therapy?

Shayna: I have to do an audition and a musician ship test. I am still playing the violin and the double bass. I was part of the Australian Girl’s Choir but I had to stop doing it once Year 12 was over as they only accept school children. But they wanted me to come back and be a senior leader.

Carla Gottgens: Are you still in contact with any one from school?

Shayna: I don’t speak to anyone from school anymore except Zoe, I have lost contact with them.

My goals for this year are to go to Europe next year with Zoe and her friend Dash and then go to university eventually. I am still with Sasha my boyfriend, I don’t really plan on moving in with him. My mum wants me to stay home with her for a while. My parents don’t want me to go back to Europe by myself. Sasha won’t go back for another three years, he is now just looking after his brother. I could live in England for a year, my visa is still valid.

I still want to be a music therapist or psychologist one or the other and I just want to be happy.

I go out a lot and catch up with everyone since I have been back from Europe as I don’t have anything else to do at the moment. I am finding it really hard to find a job even when they ask for no experience and all I have done is a bar
course but with no experience. I could go back to tele-marketing which I did prior to going overseas but that would be my last resort.

(From 2004 to 2007 I lost contact with Shayna. I had a number of phone numbers but these were either disconnected or ex-flat mates or family who would take a message and pass it on. Zoe had a current number for Shayna and gave it to me during 2006)


**Carla Gottgens:** Shayna we haven't been in contact for a few years, can you describe what you have been doing over the past two years?

**Shayna:** I was enrolled at university studying social work. I took a year off but I planned to go back to study in 2007.

I was diagnosed with bipolar and have been in and out of hospital for the past year. I had been diagnosed with depression when I was fourteen but two years ago they changed the diagnosis. Only recently have I come out of hospital and I feel like I am back to my old self. I feel fantastic. I live with my dad who is very supportive. My parents split up in 2001 in my second last year of high school. It was a big thing for me at the time.

I would say the most stressful thing for me becoming an adult would have been my parents separation. And dealing with my sexuality. I'm gay. I always knew and I told my parents when I was fifteen and then got a boyfriend for a bit. I was with Sasha for two and a half years. It was like coming out again as I had already done it and Sasha was great and we had a great relationship. He has a girlfriend now and they just traveled around Australia together. He was very sad about breaking up but very supportive.

I knew at the time that separation was for the best regarding my parents, I had the communication between them.

I have been at university for one year now. I still want to do music therapy but possibly later in life after I finish my social work degree. I went to Deacon University in Geelong I lived in Geelong all last year. I moved back after I was in a relationship for two years that broke down. We lived together and my girlfriend didn't want me to go back to uni. She didn't want me to go to university because I had cheated on her with someone in Geelong and she didn't want me to go back to Geelong. I tried commuting but it was too much for me at that time.

I have just been in hospital for two weeks and before that a month. They trialed me on different medication to see what works. I am a completely different person now to what I was two months ago.

I am still in touch with Zoe, not so much my Swinburne school friends but more the friends from the Steiner school I went to before Swinburne. I still play the violin, but I'm looking for another singing group now to join.

Carla Gottgens: Can you tell me what you have been doing since we last spoke just over a year ago?

Shayna: I didn’t go back to uni since I last saw you.

Carla Gottgens: Why didn’t you go back to uni?

Shayna: I went to Queensland, I didn’t go back to uni because I decided it was too far away and too much stress. I moved out of my dad’s place last September (2007).

Carla Gottgens: Why did you move out of your dad’s

Shayna: My friends came back from overseas and started living with me in my dad’s house and we decided to move out together and we have been living here ever since.

I didn’t start working again until a couple of months ago.

I think after I last spoke to you I might have gone back into hospital. I think what may have happened was that I went to Queensland and lived there for a few months and I relapsed while I was there and then came back to Melbourne to go to hospital.

Carla Gottgens: What triggers it?

Shayna: Sometimes nothing, or all sorts of things.

Carla Gottgens: Are you good now?

Shayna: Yes I have been good now for a long time now, I have lots of doctors appointments that I need to go to and it is a way of keeping an eye on me and helping me identify when things are not too great.

For my mental health my family is a big support. My coming out was different I found the support was from my friends. My dad is ok with it but my mum still has issues with it.

I look after my sister’s kids a fair bit. And I see my brother weekly who stays with my dad once a week.

I can’t remember being in hospital for a long time for the first few weeks I can’t remember much at all so it didn’t seem that long. There are lots of group sessions.

My dad is also bipolar.
I work at a night club in the city called Eurotrash. I work in the bar there. My shift starts at 9pm and finishes and 3 or 4 in the morning.

**Carla Gottgens:** How do you find the late nights considering your medical condition?

**Shayna:** Really easy, it suits me, I am definitely a night person, I find it hard to get up in the mornings.

I had recently just quit a job I had in a hospital renting out TVs and then I got this job.

I plan to go back to study...something..., hopefully hopefully next year. I am going to Europe in September this year. I am saving up money for it, my parents don’t support me financially.

**Carla Gottgens:** What about when you are in hospital, who financially supports you then?

**Shayna:** I am on a pension. I am allowed to work 15 hours a week. My doctor’s suggest I don’t work any more than that. I have been on it for about two years now.

I definitely still want to go back to university to follow the line of social work and music therapy but I would probably go and do a TAFE course first to get me back in to studying and then decide what I should do at university. It would be part time at university if I went back because of the stress. I would get credits from my previous courses.

**Carla Gottgens:** What do you do socially these days?

**Shayna:** My work is really social. I have been seeing someone for about 8 months now. We go out and my housemates and I go out places.

**Carla Gottgens:** How is your relationship with your mum and dad?

**Shayna:** My dad is really happy I have moved out, it was time. They don’t worry about me too much because they know I will tell them when things aren’t good. They don’t worry unless I tell them they should. I speak to my dad almost every day and see him about once a week. My mum I see about once a month. My relationship with my dad is much closer than with my mum.

I think my mum is coming to terms with my homo-sexuality and she likes my current partner so that helps.

I still play the violin, I do it just for myself.

Starting work again has been a big mile stone for me, I find it quite liberating as it was a really long time since I had worked. I did work in a clothing retail
store called Big City Chic in the city but it didn’t last long because I am not that suited to retail. The night club work suits me better, I like working at night because I like to sleep during the day. My shift might start at 9pm and finish at 4am.


At this very point in time I am sitting in an internet cafe in Heidelberg, Germany. I am traveling for six weeks around Europe. Back in Australia I am living in a house with three of my friends and working as a head bartender at a night club in the city. I plan to return to study next year and start studying division 2 nursing. After this I plan on finishing my social work degree. I have been dating my girlfriend Maria for just over a year and the relationship is going strong.

Now the question about being an adult. My first response was that I am not in fact an adult, but the more that I think about it the more that I know that I am. I think that over the last year I have been aware of a responsibility for myself and to me this means that I am an adult. That all the things that people did to look after me when I was growing up I have now taken responsibility for. Some of these things include finances, living arrangements, and most of all care of my self. And instead of being offered help when I needed it, I now ask because I know when I do.

Plus there is also the fact that the kids don’t let me sit on their table at Christmas time!
ZOE


Carla Gottgens: Zoe can you start by telling me about yourself, your family and where you go to school?

Zoe: I am the oldest of four girls, my parents are divorced. I mainly live with my Dad but I split my time between living in the country in Seymour, where my father lives and living in Melbourne with the family of friends while I complete high school. My mother lives in the country in a town near to where my father lives. I am close to both my parents but I chose to live with my father. My father lives in an old converted hospital in a country town. He is a retired vet.

I went to a Steiner school in Melbourne up until the end of Year 10, I was living with family friends until an illness struck a member of the family, I had to move back to Seymour and I also moved to a more mainstream public high school. I moved to the main stream high school as they had a focus on arts and music which I identified with. I was commuting to and from Melbourne each day to attend school. The round trip would take up to three hours. When the work load increased in Year 12 I moved in to Melbourne again and lived with my best friend, Dash and his family to save me the travel time in the preparation for completing Year 12.

My mum and dad gave me and my sisters the choice of where we could go to school.

I have moved back with my dad but I plan to move back to Melbourne and flat with friends when Year 12 finishes. I think I might do a secretarial TAFE course I think it pays better than bar work.

Carla Gottgens: What are your plans after school finishes, will you study or work?

Zoe: When I was looking at post school options I considered music and media courses at university to make video clips but I didn’t think there was much work in that field, I thought that area was more like something you got pulled
into. My father is happy with whatever I choose to do but stresses that I should have something to fall back on.

In Year 11 and 12 I did Music, Drama, Philosophy and Literature. I knew I wouldn’t get a high score with the subjects I chose but I might do a make-up correspondence course in Year 11 or 12 once I have finished to beef up my mark.

I am in a music competition at the moment through school called Battle of the Bands.

I am trying to find inspiration in my music, a friend told me to just play anything either good or bad and I would find gold. I got freaked out by the competition I participated in at school. I came 2nd in the comp although it wasn’t official only 1st place was awarded, I think I got it for my participation as the crowd warm up act at the beginning of every competition heat to ease the nerves of the other performers.

Carla Gottgens: Who gives you inspiration musically?

Zoe: Anni de Franco, Dido, Michael Jackson (they’re very good entertainers) and Madonna, she would be a role model.

I used to dream of wanting to be a famous song writer but now I don’t know... to retire or something that has a lot of variety in it but something to do with music. I don’t think I am good enough for a music course where you need to be a grade seven or eight. I think I am only a grade three and it would take a lot of hard work. I want to do something to do with music and media. The rest of my family, my mum and my sisters are musical.

Carla Gottgens: What is your relationship like with your dad?

Zoe: He has just entered a new relationship and his new girlfriend is beginning to spend a lot of time at our place. I don’t feel she is very genuine, I feel that she says things just to fit in or to try and make conversation.


Carla Gottgens: Zoe you have now moved back to Melbourne again, tell me what you are doing at the moment and who you are living with?

Zoe: I am living in Melbourne in a share house with my best friend Dash and a number of other people.

I have finished a hospitality certificate at the Hotel Sofitel in the city, I am working there now. The hospitality course gave me an insight into the workings of a large hotel with experience from bar work to room service. I was also working at an Indian restaurant where the owners would pick me up and drop me home after work. I told them I would have to quit soon as I was getting towards the end of my certificate and I mentioned that I would be...
getting a full time job at the end of my study possibly at the hotel and they said no you’re not we own you. I tried to quit twice but they wouldn’t let me so I just stopped phoning them. It was cash in hand work. I don’t get Centrelink benefits anymore so I rely on my work.

**Carla Gottgens: Describe your experience at Hotel Sofitel**

**Zoe:** The classes took place in the Hotel Sofitel but they got around paying us the proper casual rate by highlighting we were being trained. I am now working for Sofitel at $16 per hour and weekends are higher and after midnight is even higher. I was working in banquets for a few months and I developed RSI\(^{23}\) in my wrists and screwed up my back a bit. We would be serving 300 to 400 seated people. I then got a transfer to room service. I take orders over the phone and prepare food, I like working with the small group of three people rather than the groups of thirty in banquets with the back breaking work. You are never going to get thirty people getting along.

It’s all a bit wanky, a very male dominated work environment but it’s all good in the end.

The whole place is full of gossip, I don’t like it.

Because it is so orientated around males, there are only three or four women working when I do and I find it difficult. It’s not sexual harassment but there are lots of comments and I feel really small but I deal with it. The comments aren’t enough to be reported. The chef dropped out of school at year 10 and has been cooking food for 30 years and when a woman walks past he will make a comment to another male worker like “did you shag her the other weekend?” , it isn’t nice but isn’t directly in my face.

**Carla Gottgens: What do you do socially?**

**Zoe:** I have started socialising a bit more now and after finishing my certificate I have decided I want more time off rather than working all the time. I want Friday’s off, I am still negotiating.

I won’t take shit from the guys, I’ll give it back with a witty comment and tell them that is just not on and refuse to get walked over especially by some drop out year 10 cook who is now 30 years old.

**Carla:** You mentioned when you finished school that you were going to do a secretarial course instead of bar work, what happened to that idea?

**Zoe:** I did look into doing a secretarial course and one of my friends did but I never got round to it and hospitality was so much easier to get into. You can get paid $50 an hour to be a waiter if you know your shit. If you know your wines and know how to make coffee really, really well, and you’re spot on and have your brains about you can get good tips. At room service I can pay my

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\(^{23}\) RSI - Repetitive Strain Injury
rent and even maybe buy a top at the end of the week with all my tips, so I
don't have to take my rent out of my wages.

**Carla Gottgens:** You mentioned you were keen to try and do well in your final
exams for Year 12 High School, how did you go?

**Zoe:** I got so nervous and so upset with them and my mind said they are not
the important thing for me and the VCE doesn’t apply to me. I am not
interested in going to university to become a doctor or a lawyer. I didn’t do
very well but I learnt a shit load and realize the score doesn’t mean a thing to
me. I want to continue learning the things that are of interest to me whether
it’s through TAFE courses or experiences. I could always enter university as
a mature age student at a later time.

**Carla Gottgens:** How does your father feel about the direction you have
taken?

**Zoe:** My father wanted me to have something to fall back on and wanted me
to do really well. I have a different view to my dad and told him what I wanted
to do. He was conscious of him wanting more out of me. I don’t see much of
my parents or family at all. The clash of personalities has been going on for
years. And although they appear different they really aren’t. When he was
my age he worked and partied a lot which is what I am doing now but I think
my dad doesn’t like to see the similarities.

**Carla Gottgens:** You mentioned Madonna as being a role model when you
were in Year 12, has that changed now?

**Zoe:** I don’t know about my role models any more, Madonna and Annie di
Franco are still up there but I don’t know about the whole Michael Jackson
media crap at the moment and I don’t have any respect for him. Michael
Moore is now a role model, I have a lot of respect for that man. Nino Brusari
who is a hypnotist is a big influence for me, we have talked and talked about
religions and philosophies and I have a better idea of what I believe in now.
He lives in Mount Dandenong with this really beautiful property that I visited,
to relax in and get back in touch with nature. Because I am in the city I feel I
am just surrounded by buildings. I met him through a friend who visited him to
do past life regressions. So I went out to see him and had a cup of tea with
him to discuss what he believed in and he gave me some books to read and I
have visited a few times. He is in his 40’s. I haven’t done a past life
regression I’m a bit skeptical. What they talk about is really interesting but I
have heard lots of horror stories about people going under hypnosis. I went
up there to see him as a counselor but found we ended up chatting about
other stuff.

I went to see him for more of an escape. I had my friends and they were good
to talk to, but it was nice to have someone who is a professional and who has
a lot of wisdom about left and right and blue and black and can mentor you
through it. He gave some really good advice and it’s what I needed. My
friends have their own distractions at the moment so it’s good to have
someone else to talk to. I have not always had a circle of friends. My friends have moved and changed and I found myself sitting in Melbourne in a house with my friends and I didn’t want to lay it all on them and they can’t give me the advice I need as they are all trying to work out their own lives and going through it themselves. I didn’t want to keep sitting in this duct or void of “what the hell is happening I am becoming an adult and I don’t understand”. It makes it easier to off load it on to someone else.

**Carla Gottgens:** You were very keen on music when we first met, do you still play any instruments?

**Zoe:** I was in to music a lot in high school and I still pick up my guitar.

**Carla Gottgens:** We are sitting in your lounge room and there are musical instruments everywhere, are your flat mates musicians as well?

**Zoe:** There are a few musicians in the house we are not a band we are all individual.

I had a block for about a year and didn’t play and got distracted by having to work and pay rent, I lost touch with the inner child. At high school you are so care free except to do your home work and pass, socialize with your friends and have a beer and you don’t have to worry about having a job. I am still interested in writing music for videos but it’s a bit like the education thing, when I turn 25 I might go and jump in to some media. I think it is important to keep educating yourself through out life. I had an idea that when we were 30 we might go and open a medical clinic for homeopathy. I am not very medical but thought I might go and do some massage courses or some dance therapy.

There was a time when I was smoking pot a lot (after school) and instead of dad lecturing me, he would say I did that too so have fun.

I don’t like being classified as a hippy, someone who dances with children and hugs trees. My ultimate goal is to keep learning from experiences that when I get up there to the creator I can say what I have learnt.

**Carla Gottgens:** What would your current goals be?

**Zoe:** My goal is to understand myself a lot more. I feel that I have had the responsibility of looking after myself for a long time due to my housing situation and being away from home. Except that I have not always had to pay for myself, but I find financially supporting myself is not that hard. I did have to ask my parents for money before when I was on $6 an hour but I haven’t had to now for months.

**Carla Gottgens:** Have there been any major upsets in the past year?

**Zoe:** When my dad chose to no longer support me, that was a big thing, huge. He said that as soon as Year 12 finishes he would no longer support me so I
said "fine I will find a job". But I was only 19 and tried to point out to him that it was tough. I had to find a way to make it work and I did and realized I could do it. He never gave me a reason he just seemed to click his finger and it stopped and that is what hurt the most there was no logic behind his reasoning. I am sure there was but he never told me, he said I was a big girl now and I could do it. I think that he was still being supportive he will bring groceries if he comes over (a 2 minute noodle pack). It did feel strange at the start, I said OOOOh I am in a box all by myself. What am I doing in this box, where is the door.

I think that I am stereotyped all the time and I think that other people find it safe to stereotype people so they know what they are dealing with. I am asked at work if I am a hippy or a goth.

**Carla Gottgens:** What is your social life like?

**Zoe:** Socially I find if I go out at night I am screwed for work the next day. I see a lot of people from High School that have the mentality of now they have finished high school they can go and try drugs and party and have sex with strangers, I hate night clubs I'm just not into it. Me and my friends are just in to other things like cooking, playing guitar going out for coffee and doing more low key stuff.


**Carla Gottgens:** Zoe you have been away for a while, fill me in on what you have been doing for the past year or two.

**Zoe:** I left the Sofitel after working fifty hour weeks and realising that wasn’t such a good thing. I went on a little crazy spree because I couldn’t handle the work load I had been given. I took a break and went on the dole and worked at a pet store for a year and got to run the shop. The boss was a dominant male Italian who liked things run his way so there were a few show downs. I then quit after a year and went overseas to England and Scotland after saving up money. My granddad died so I went over to look after my grandma for a while.

When I came back I was volunteering at Ceres (an environmental park) doing horticultural work, I wanted to apply for their internship but only one person is accepted every two years.

I didn’t actually complete my hospitality certificate with the Sofitel as I thought I might do another apprentice ship somewhere else.

When I traveled to Scotland I picked up the Reiki experience from having back pain and visiting a local natural therapies clinic. I enjoyed the Reiki experience and since I have been back I have been learning it and practicing it. You don’t actually touch people you just channel their chakra’s and energy. I just practice it on friends in the park but I am due to go for my next attunement with a Reiki master outside of Melbourne.
It was something that I wanted to follow through with.

**Carla Gottgens:** You were seeing a counselor the last time we met, are you still in touch with him?

**Zoe:** I haven’t seen the hypnotherapist for a while we keep in touch via email but he doesn’t feel that I need to go back to him at the moment. The purpose of my visits to him were to get rid of my teenage angst so I could grow up. I was feeling blocked with issues about......oh my mother, oh my father......

**Carla Gottgens:** How is your relationship with your parents?

**Zoe:** My relationship is fairly distant with my parents and I think that is the best thing at the moment. I think that until I have done exactly what I think they think I should do like going to university and getting the job that they think I should get living at a distance is the best thing. My dad asks me what I am doing with my life at the moment and I reply by saying I am living it and have actually done a lot and if you could just relax that would be good. My mum is very busy with her own life at the moment.

**Carla Gottgens:** Do you see your sisters much?

**Zoe:** I have a lot to do with my sisters. I get along better with my second younger sister who I didn’t previously get along with but now Dominique is a big happy person who is great to hang out with.

At the beginning of the divorce my mum was all by herself and I went over to be with her. My mum has her own negative thoughts about Christine (Zoe’s dad’s girlfriend). So we had this really horrible idea about Christine because I had all the background info but had never actually met her. I feel it was too much pressure for me to deal with both of the adult’s problems.

**Carla Gottgens:** Can you identify a time that you felt life was particularly hard or that you had reached a milestone?

**Zoe:** Being seventeen was definitely the hardest time for me but the easiest was possibly in the last two or three years although living alone was difficult and you have to survive. But when I was seventeen there was a lot of shit going down and the place I was living at when I was at Steiner, the people asked me to move out as he was sick (Roger) and then I moved back with my dad. And then had to commute back and forth during year 12 until I moved in with Dash, my best friend. Moving in at seventeen with Dash was probably my downfall. Two best friends too much partying, too much free reign.

His parents were strict but we just stayed up late and visited the neighbours and friends when we had a lot of work to do. I felt my family put expectations on me to grow up quickly since I was twelve. My dad would say to us four
girls that we should be independent and it will help us grow up. I know being the oldest I have had to set the bar a little and I think that my sisters see where I have gone and have learnt from that.

I don’t really see anyone from school anymore and I realize that many were just acquaintances not really friends. Me and Dash are still the strongest link and we may sometimes see people from school at 21st parties but we don’t keep in touch with them. I find it difficult to hang out with Shayna at the moment as she is going through a heavy thing at the moment of her own. I want my friends to just relax and get over their issues.

I was with a boy called Gabrielle and I thought we were just two kids and too young. I didn’t feel that I was the perfect person for him and that he needed to grow up a bit as well. I thought the relationship was great but for a different time somewhere in the future.

I found that once school had finished I didn’t have the class to go to so the motivation wasn’t there. And then surviving and work came about. And now in 2005 I realize that I want to be a song writer and I don’t want to deny it any more. I am surrounded by musicians where I live and I’m learning from an American guy. It’s not like a rock star dream I just want to play for people. I don’t want the fame I just want to play I don’t want to sign up with a company and have Pepsi slashed across my face or do interviews, I want to do my music and say I am off to NSW now to eat vegetables which is hopefully the plan.

I wanted to do a three year diploma at Burnleigh TAFE while waiting to apply for an internship with CERES. At Burnleigh they teach you everything about growing veges and how to cultivate a forest and work with the land around you. The eventual plan is to move out to NSW and grow our own veges and have a healing practice where people can come in for free. I think I will be one of the first people up at the property so I will need to know what to do. Dash and I are buying land next year.

I think we will live together forever we are like non sexual life partners. I live with another woman called Carla who is a dancer and teacher but never really gets anywhere with her ambitions.


Carla Gottgens: Did you get your application in with CERES for their internship, you mentioned the last time we spoke?

Zoe: I didn’t go through with my application to CERES as they only accept one person every two years. I used to go down voluntarily every weekend and have a coffee and help out.

But I haven’t done that at all this year.

Carla Gottgens: How is your relationship with your dad now?
Zoe: It has improved over the years and I went on a holiday with him to New Zealand along with my sisters.

I had been working as a waitress at a bar and I became manager there but left after a year. During that time I became part of a theatre group we toured with The Big Day Out and performed at a few festivals. There was lots of partying. Then the dynamics of the group broke down especially when money started coming in and we had to rehearse and do schedules and things.

After working at the bar for a year, I headed to Falls Creek to work through the ski season. I left after two weeks of working for a really cheap and awful pub and then went to a family run Alpine Lodge. I loved it. I made friends with some of the massage girls and got a free massage some times.

Since I have been back in Melbourne, my boyfriend Milos and my best friend Dash and I are looking at renting out a room to do physio, homeopathy and Reiki. I'm not working at the moment but I'm looking at doing medical reception work. I want to get out of the whole hospitality thing and want to look at getting into the field where I can start learning about things to do that are aligned with my interests.

I find that I've been really successful in getting jobs but when I get in and trial it, it becomes really mundane and not what I was expecting.

My attitude towards my family has softened, I feel they are all starting to grow up and find their own directions. My dad is settled in a de facto relationship with his girlfriend and they are getting old together and my mum is now living with another man. I feel I am now not forced to spend time with my parents any more, I can and do choose to spend time with them and I feel that the bond is bigger now.

My father was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2007, I was very upset about it but knew that he would be ok, as he was still doing things at his usual pace. It was sad seeing him after the operation and seeing him quite frail as he is not a man who likes to be seen as weak. You have to roll with the punches and have a joke with it. For me it was like he just had a cold as he didn't want a big deal to be made about it. I think he is alright now.

Carla Gottgens: Are you still in contact with the counselor?

Zoe: I no longer keep in regular contact with the hypnotist.

The funny thing with the spiritual guide is that he obviously got caught with the wind and got spirited away. He went over to the US to further his study and when he came back he told me he had to focus on older people who maybe needed his help more than I did. He said you should be ok with your past now which I didn't seem to think was fair as I didn't just see him for my past I saw him as a friend I could talk to. I think he saw his new clientele as people
he could charge more money from and so were more viable patients. He was charging me but not as much as he might charge other adults.

**Carla Gottgens:** Could you identify a time when you felt you had changed from being a teenager and had become an adult?

**Zoe:** There was a certain point when I started feeling a bit older, like when I was 21 or 22. I have psychological conversations with Dash. And there are ways I have defense mechanisms in place now where I can deal with certain things in a better way than how I used to. I would get stressed out about a bill or an event and now I don’t stress out so much. It was a gradual thing I have always just pottered around. I went into hospitality so I could pay bills but only over the past year I have decided to go into an area where I have an interest.

My interest in natural health has been from family and friends and the coincidences that have happened to me and I add up the numbers that count and it’s all connected. Like my sisters are all entering the health profession, my mum is a nurse, my dad was a vet, Milos, my boyfriend is a physio, Dash, my best friend is a homeopath. There are just huge things that just stuck out like a sore thumb. Ideally in my mind I wanted to do music but it just didn’t seem feasible now or realistic. Maybe music therapy but not a rock star or anything.

My dad knows I plod along at my own pace and he is expecting me to make my decision and start studying and I do to, but we both want to see me happy and making my own decisions.


**Carla Gottgens:** Zoe you have done a lot over the past six years and I have often asked you if you could identify a moment when you had become an adult, what would your answer be now to that question?

**Zoe:** Seemingly, the transition into adulthood has been a gradual process. Within my own mind’s eye, I have always recognised the maturity and sensibility that I carry within myself. My father taught me: “Zoe! The Three R’s mate! Respect for yourself, Respect for others and Responsibility for your actions.” It has always stayed with me. I am conscious of that all the time. My point of responsibility was put into action as a young woman of 16. Though still innocent and capable of making wrong decisions, they were the beginning steps of my independence, which I recognise to be the first stages of the transition into adulthood. I am lucky for having been given so much choice in life from my family, I am proud of the woman they let me be, and feel that the very moment I realised what my actions would mean for myself and to others, was a real turning point into this thing we call adulthood! From here, where I am currently, I wonder how long I have felt like this, alive to take my chances and accept my falls; to still feel at times too young to have these responsibilities I’ve come to accept but know that I would never want any less. Containment is a lifestyle that my family never let me know,
contentment is the gift they let me grow into.

So currently I'm in the butt-end of completing a Diploma in Remedial Massage at the Australian College of Natural Medicine. (Yay! Much Joy!) I'm hoping to go on to complete an advanced diploma in health sciences holistic Kinesiology. This course will take some time to complete (4 years part-time I think?) so before the lock down, I plan to work in health services and aim to travel with the job! My boyfriend is a physiotherapist, so there is some talk of working together in the future, while even traveling too!

Over the next year I'm planning on saving monies to pay off debts which have occurred due to a student lifestyle and save up for the next big thing in my book of tricks...TRAVEL!!! I'm hitting South America for a few months to climb Machu Pichu, dance in Rio and sing, eat and be merry amongst the locals! Then it's off to Canada for a ski season and work to build up on funds again. (This part of the idea is great as I love the snow, and have done a season before in Australia, so more adventure and fun!) After the ski season, Milos and I (Milos is my boyfriend who's coming for the ride! ...Lucky him!) are a little unsure where to after Canada, I thought one wild and lavish week in the centre of New York for shopping and fun just for giggles! Milos is very much interested in seeing some of Asia so, I guess where ever the wind may blow! I hope to leave sometime around June/July next year!! And again, providing I can save up the cash to follow this little gold nugget!

I work for my boyfriends parents who operate a non-profit organisation that helps refugees and immigrants get an education in certificates and diplomas. It's a diverse job, and I love the people I work with as well as the cultures that I get to see and understand at a closer picture!

I'm currently living in Abbotsford, still with Dash, would never move away from him, he is the most beautiful friend I have in the world, I'm so happy to have met him and for him to accept me even when I'm at my worst! We also live with his sister (between you and me, really don't get along with her! She's older and pulls rank in the house all the time, alpha-dog type scenario!). Life feels wonderful, I support myself, (although dad helped out with fees for school!!! Ahh bless him!) I exercise and maintain a healthy range in fitness, a have a great friendship circle which over the last few years, I've laughed and loved so much with them! I'm meeting new people and making many friends, and I think if I go on then I'll probably turn into one of those chuffed happy moments at the end of the Brady Bunch show! But seriously, happy endings for me Carla, it's been a fun 6 years or so, many highs and lows, much that I didn't understand then that makes sense to me now! Life is good...well... umm for me... I mean I know that the world isn't doing so great... yeah... hmmm.. well think globally act locally!!!
APPENDIX B
RMIT ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL
18 September 2002

Ms C Gottgens
8 Sturrock St
East Brunswick 3057

SUBJECT: Ethics Classification for Research Project

Title of project: Where to Now?

Dear Ms Gottgens,

The RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, at its meeting of 31 July 2002, considered the above research project.

The Ethics sub-committee resolved that the application be approved as Risk Level 2 – Minimal Risk.

Note that if there should be any change in the design of your research you are asked to notify the Committee immediately.

I apologise for the delay in providing you with this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Nolan
Secretary of Faculty Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

Cc Dr John Storey, Senior Supervisor, School of Creative Media