

# Pain of lost children sears through us all

MARG WENHAM



FIGURE it's a universal truth – that learning of the death of someone else's children, even if unknown to us, will trigger feelings of grief, even if momentarily, in all of us and no more so than in other parents. This swift sensation of anguish is almost always accompanied by a heightened sense of fear for your own children's lives – for their safety, for their future.

So it was yesterday morning that I felt an especially sharp stab of pain when reading about the bodies of the two tiny brothers missing since Monday afternoon being found in Townsville's Ross River.

The accompanying picture of the little tackers, taken by CCTV, as they walked along unknowingly on their way to what would be their death, brought with it prickling eyes and then warm tears (I'm fighting them back again now thinking about it).

These feelings are always especially strong for me when there are little boys, but particularly brothers, involved, and I'm sure the sole reason for this is because I have three sons who are as close together in ages – two of them closer – as were Barak Austral, 5, and Julio Sariago, 3.

I remember the same acute grief when learning of the death of two young brothers in a horrific car crash in a nearby suburb in 2006. Another brother was badly injured. A fourth was not in the car.

My sons were about the same age, and my oldest had not long got his licence and was driving his brothers around, like the oldest of the boys who died driving the car that also killed his 12-year-old brother.

I was so affected by the accident that, over the following days, the compulsion to go to the scene of the crash became overwhelming.



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So I went, in tears, with flowers and a card in which I wrote awkwardly, apologetically, to the boys' parents – two shattered strangers – about my sorrow for their loss.

It was the same when Daniel Morcombe had been missing for several days and it was becoming clear something terrible must surely have happened to him. I'd felt a fist of fear tightening around my heart.

Daniel was the same age as my middle son and a similarly gentle soul.

I remember, some time much later, having to attend a press conference with the Morcombes and, given the opportunity to speak with Daniel's mother, Denise, I found myself unable to ask the questions I'd prepared because of the lump in my throat that I

knew if I tried to clear would unleash an embarrassing (for both of us) torrent of emotion.

There have, of course, been many more times when I've felt the pain of other parents' losses and I know there will be many more.

And, even now when my sons are adults off making their way in their world, I still fear for them – for their wellbeing, their safety.

I often think about what goes into being parent. But I had cause to focus on what it meant to me, at least, a few years ago when I wrote to No. 3 son in the midst of a rift that was becoming imperative we heal because of the birth of his first son, my first grandchild.

"Believe it or not," I wrote, "the birth and very early months turn out

to be the easy bit. Because then comes learning to be a parent, usually from within a mental fog born of sleep deprivation. Learning to put yourself – always – second. Learning that your life as you knew it has gone. Learning you need to give up things you always thought were important to you.

"And so, over 20 or more years, you find yourself responsible for someone wholly dependent on you for everything from being kept safe and warm and fed (in a home that's as comfortable as possible), to learning to talk, to walk, to go to the toilet, to dress, to read, to ride a bike, to kick a footy, to sing in a choir, to be a good person, to love and be loved.

"You teach about sharing, being respectful and tolerant of others, understanding manners.

"Then there's starting school ... changing school ... finishing school ... decisions about careers ... and on and on and on.

"And all of it is accompanied by worry. Constant. Worry ... And sometimes you think you're just going under. That it's all going to fall apart. That you just can't cope.

"But there's no running away from any of it ... It's such a big undertaking, such a huge and long and important thing, that it really can't be summed up in just a few words ..."

I don't feel able to improve on that right now, though I'm sure others can offer more, different and better insights on this thing that is parenting.

All that said, it is a flat unarguable fact that I can have no real idea of the extent of the agony that parents who lose a child or children experience because I have not, myself, known it.

A part of me is uncomfortable, squirming, guilty, as I try to write this piece. But I think, really, all I seek is to send a message from one loving parent to every other, but particularly today, the parents – the family – of two little brothers in Townsville that we are one – we are with you.

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## LOOKING BACK



**10 YEARS AGO**  
IRWIN SNAPS BACK AT CROC HARVESTING PLAN  
State authorities are locked in a showdown with high-profile conservationist Terri Irwin over a plan to harvest wild crocodile eggs on Cape York. Government-backed researchers are investigating the viability of selling the eggs for export at up to \$50 each. But Mrs Irwin says the harvesting could be a disaster for the species.



**40 YEARS AGO**  
TO MEND A BROKEN HEART  
Toowoomba: Toowoomba children want to honour a man who left the district many years ago after vandals smashed his dreams. Peter Hooley, whose whereabouts now are unknown, was once a janitor at Toowoomba State High School and created an amusement park at Helidon. The park had covered wagons, wigwams and statues of Red Indians.



**80 YEARS AGO**  
GERMANS SEEK TRADE WITH DOMINIONS  
London: First mention of dominions, especially Australia, in connection with the forthcoming Anglo-German trade negotiations was made by Germany today. The reference was made during talks in German quarters on the possibility of increasing the export and import trade between Germany and the British dominions.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Instead of worrying about what you cannot control, shift your energy to what you can create.  
- Roy T. Bennett

Prof Gary Martin is an executive at the Australian Institute of Management

## Jobseekers best think before showing their ink

THIS summer is setting new benchmarks, with temperatures across the country soaring above their usual averages and encouraging us to don the coolest forms of clothing to escape the heat.

With arguably more skin on display than ever before, the latest research from Australian consultancy McCrindle tells us that if you are starting to believe tattoos have become more popular than ever, you are right on the money.

One in five Australians has at least one tattoo.

For many years, people associated tattoos with groups described as being outside the social centre. Think gangs, bikies and hardened criminals.

But with about 20 per cent of all Australians now inked, tattoos and body art have gained a much wider social acceptance and are increasingly seen as a form of

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self-expression rather than the domain of those on the fringe.

Still, one question remains unanswered – does this social acceptance extend to employers gradually changing their tune when it comes to hiring those with visible tattoos?

In many of today's modern workplaces, negative attitudes towards the inked may have started to fade, though reaction to body bling is likely to come down to where the tattoo is and the message it portrays.

Some organisations have rightfully recognised that not hiring those with tattoos denies the organisation access to about one-fifth of the available talent pool.

With more people than ever getting some form of body art,

businesses have become acutely aware of the negative impact of excluding an ever-increasing cohort from their prospective workforce.

Even some of today's most successful business people make little attempt to cover up their tattoos, acknowledging that we ought to reject any form of stereotyping in our workforces – and that includes unfairly labelling those who sport tattoos and body art.

In fact, if you are applying for a position in a trendy clothing outlet, a visible tattoo might be viewed as a fashionable accessory, and actually increase your chances of getting the position.

Notwithstanding this era of increased acceptance, the skull that is the size of a 50c piece and neatly tattooed on the back of your neck will probably work against you if you are trying to secure a position in a fine-dining restaurant.

It is usually not unlawful for Australian employers to discriminate against employees with tattoos.

This means that some employers will continue to have in place dress or appearance codes which, for any number of reasons, reject what seems to be a growing movement to allow visible tattoos in the workplace.

So while tattoos and body art are no longer the kiss of death in many workplaces, the best approach for someone applying for a position remains to think before showing off their ink.

That is because the broader community acceptance of your body art has not necessarily made it to a workplace near you.

If you remain unsure how your tattoo will be viewed, keep it covered up.



# World awaits second summit showdown



**TOUGH TALKS:** Kim Jong-un arrives in the Vietnamese border town of Dong Dang on his way to meet Donald Trump in Hanoi. Pictures: AP

The fact there will be a second meeting between Trump and Kim offers hope for peace in the region, writes **Sarah Blake**

**W**HEN US President Donald Trump begins his second peace summit with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un in Hanoi tomorrow, the world will be watching.

Events begin today with meetings between Trump and the Vietnamese prime minister and president, ahead of tomorrow's bilateral between Trump and Kim.

The pair last met at their historic Singapore Summit in June, where with much fanfare they signed a commitment towards the complete and verifiable denuclearisation of North Korea.

But since Trump declared: "There is no longer a nuclear threat from North Korea", both countries have been walking an at-times tricky path towards what that looks like.

Critics say Kim's actions so far have been mere nods to denuding that could be reversed "at any minute", and that a stonewalling North Korea has failed to hand over any verifiable details of its weapons and capabilities.

Trump himself has in recent days sought to downplay expectations of what this week will achieve, moving from his hardline stance of complete capitulation from Pyongyang in return for the lifting of sanctions to a position that would characterise smaller concessions as success.

Nonetheless, the fact Pyongyang

hasn't fired a missile in more than a year, that relations between North and South Korea are at their best in decades, and that the Trump-Kim dialogue is even happening are cause for hope.

But with the biggest variable for this week's summit the two mercurial leaders, many are concerned at what they might agree to when Trump and Kim sit down alone.

"There is a lot of concern about there being too much on the table," says Korea expert David Kim from the nonpartisan Stimson Center's Non Proliferation and Security program.

#### FOUR GOALS

Following the first steps taken in Singapore, analysts say America's aim is divided into four pillars – denuclearisation, peace on the Korean Peninsula, improving diplomatic and economic relations between Washington and Pyongyang, and returning to the US the remains of up to 7500 soldiers who died in the 1950-53 Korean War.

The first, most pressing concern is denuclearisation, but the dismantling of Kim's facilities and capabilities is the outcome that will take longest to achieve. "It's at least a 10-year marker, meaning it's going to survive past Trump, whatever Trump's political ambitions are," David Kim says.

"But in the short term, we need to

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The biggest variable for the summit is the two mercurial leaders

see a dismantlement of facilities, a freeze on nuclear testing and missile testing. And thirdly, a cap on weapons grade fissile material production.”

The most likely announcement this week will be declaration of peace, a largely symbolic gesture that would benefit both sides – with the important caveat that it needs to be done correctly. There is some concern this would open the door to Trump pulling US troops out of South Korea, a stated aim for the isolationist leader, but the White House has denied this was up for discussion tomorrow.

For Kim, a declaration would be

another step to normalising the rogue regime's international relationships, and could further open it up to the economic opportunity current strict sanctions are denying it.

"At least if you get a peace declaration, that's symbolic, you can't reverse that, but it is a major concern, and we have to put that in writing that there is no change to alliance equities, no change of force posture and no change to the UN command. That has to be explicit," David Kim says.

#### POLITICAL CARROT

Victor Cha from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies warned North Korea had previously dangled the option of a formal end to the Korean War in order to have sanctions lifted.

"One of their classic negotiation loops is this end-of-war declaration," Cha said last week.

"(But) the sanctions are on them for proliferation behaviour and human rights abuses. They improve those things, then you lift some comparable sanctions."

For Trump, fighting several battles at home, the public-relations victory a headline declaration would bring is valuable. The President is beleaguered by ongoing fighting over funding for his border wall, and just hours before he meets Kim, his former fixer, Michael Cohen, is set to give public testimony about Trump's personal affairs on his way to prison for a three-year sentence for campaign funding violations.

Even his critics give Trump some credit for the progress so far, although many also chafe at his repeated claims that he is the first president to hold meaningful talks with North Korea.

"I'm not a Trump supporter, but I support that we have reduced tensions. It's been over 400 days now since they've tested a nuclear weapon or a missile," said David Kim.

"So in terms of a detente, Trump has made meaningful progress, but there has been no irreversible steps towards denuclearisation."

Just how important the dialogue and personal connection between Trump and Kim may be in reaching a concrete outcome was laid out in a recent speech by Stephen Biegun, Washington's lead negotiator in North Korea.

"I am not kidding when I say it is difficult for us to communicate with each other," Biegun said of hiccups in talks between envoys.

"We are located in very different parts of the world, with very different histories. We have dramatically different views on individual rights and on human rights.

"We also have no trade of any sort, no diplomatic relations and virtually no ability to communicate directly with one another."



**HISTORIC MEETING:** People wait behind barricades for the arrival of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Hanoi, Vietnam. Picture: AFP