

# The Duncce

TRACY-LEE ADAMS



A memoir about resilience,  
battling cancer three times,  
bullying, polyneuropathy  
and an escape from a narcissist

In the interests of privacy, people's identifying details have been changed in this book.

**Warning: expletive language is used.**

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For my sanity

In loving memory of Barb McCarthy, OAM

# Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,  
    Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
    For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
    I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
    My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
    Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
    Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
    How charged with punishments the scroll.  
I am the master of my fate.  
    I am the captain of my soul.

– William Ernest Henley

*'Invictus'* is Latin for 'unconquered'.

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'Invictus' by William Ernest Henley

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## Chapter 1

# School

I was born on Sunday, 26 March 1967, at Sydney Hospital.

I started kindergarten when I was five, at my local primary school, and loved it. I had fun meeting new friends and playing.

My memories of grades 1 and 2 aren't very good – only snippets. However, I do remember that every day, before recess, we had to drink a small bottle of regular unflavoured milk. The bottles were usually left outside the classroom, at the door, and the milk was *always* warm. *Yuck!* I hated it, I don't think anybody liked it.

I have one very clear memory from Grade 3, though. I had an American teacher, and for whatever reason, she obviously disliked me. She made me sit at a *small* table I couldn't get my legs underneath, at the front centre of the class. She constantly picked on me, asked me questions she knew I had no idea of the answer to, and generally enjoyed making me feel stupid in front of the class. One day – who knew why? – she took out one of her contact lenses and exclaimed to the class, 'I can no longer see Tracy's head!' She thought it was hilarious, and everyone but I laughed. I never understood why she did it, and so began my general hatred of school.

Thinking back, I recognise that the teacher's behavior was bullying, in today's terms, by someone who should've encouraged and supported me. Being a kid, and it being that era – the early 1970s – I didn't realise what was happening. The woman was my teacher, an authority figure, and I just accepted how she treated me. *She was an arsehole!*

Her abusive treatment of me went on every day, and my school work started to suffer. I hated her, and I hated doing homework. I was a very average student and was continuously in trouble for not paying attention or losing concentration in class.

It wasn't helpful that my dad started calling me a 'dunce', meaning 'stupid person', so I just started to accept I was an idiot, and stopped asserting myself at school. From that point onwards, my relationship with my father also started to disintegrate, and we rarely saw eye to eye. He always made me feel like a dope who could never do anything right!

It wasn't till I was in grades 4, 5 and 6, in what was termed senior school, that things really started to go pear shaped.

I started Grade 4 in 1976, and the big hit shows on TV after school were *The Munsters* and the *Addams Family*. Damn you, *Addams Family*: I was bullied by other students for three solid years just for having the surname Adams!

I was in the bottom class and frankly couldn't wait to grow up and get the hell out of school.

Back then, when you'd reached Grade 6 – the final year of senior school – you had to do a national exam so the educators could determine what class level you'd be enrolled in for high school. The bright students went into the top class, and the dunces went into the bottom one.

Along with every other student, I took the test, and scored in the top percentile! However, according to 'the system', I must've cheated, so I was re-tested, and it turned out I was definitely a dunce.

Despite not being the sharpest tool in the shed, I started taking guitar lessons. Mum and Dad found a local class, and before long I was getting quite good at guitar playing. The styles the teacher taught were classical and flamenco. I enjoyed the lessons, and the teacher was really nice and helpful. I guess it was due to his encouragement and support that my guitar skills improved. He never made me feel stupid if I couldn't do something straight away.

## High school

SEARCH MY THEME SONG – (c) Kiss, I was made for lovin' you.

I went into Year 7 in 1979, not quite 12 yet. High school was a lot different from primary school. Except on sports day, the school day mostly had eight periods, with recess and lunch in between, but we had the freedom to walk from classroom to classroom and had a different teacher for each subject.

I liked most subjects – Art, English, Music, Science, Physical Education (sport), Language, History, Geography, Home Science – but hated Mathematics. Maths: *yuck!*

I enjoyed Year 7 very much. I topped the class in *every* subject, including Maths, and promptly won an award at the awards night.

Maybe I wasn't a dunce after all, or the system had gotten it wrong.

Guitar playing came naturally to me, and I eventually started having lessons with another teacher, who taught at the Conservatorium of Music, in Sydney, but who also taught in Manly once a week. I got to Grade 4 in my exams.

Not long after achieving Grade 4, I started to hate the guitar. I was sick of having Dad constantly ride my arse to practise, and I was practising all the time. He always demanded I do more because I was costing him money. I was sick to death of the fact that every time one of his friends would come over, he'd want me to play – and not just one or two pieces; he'd want an entire fucking concert.

I felt like a dancing monkey, hated playing, and decided to give it away. He never forgave me.



First day of school, 1972.



Grade 6, 1978, the year I apparently cheated in the test. I'm in the first row, right of centre.

# Epilogue

SEARCH MY THEME SONG – (c) Elton John, I'm still standing.

## **It blows my mind – *how did I do it?***

I've been called a fighter, but I don't like that noun; I prefer the adjective 'practical'. And when it comes to your health, you should question everything – you know yourself best.

My conclusion: Facing cancer, three times, I always rationalised that treatment had to happen; as frightening as it was, I had no alternative – I just had to go through with it. Also, I firmly believe I got through everything due to my sense of humour and my ability to laugh at myself, even though it was no laughing matter.

I think my struggles are an example of how people survive in unimaginable situations. I don't consider myself a strong person, but at times I had to be. My life's been exhausting, and I'm fucked if I know how I achieved anything!

What will happen in relation to my polyneuropathy? That's another unknown – I've just gotta roll with it till . . . whenever and whatever.

*I don't regret anything, because I didn't cause anything.*



For me, escaping from a narcissistic relationship was a much greater challenge than fighting cancer. I didn't run away, even though I knew I needed to flee the abusive situation that'd evolved. My narcissistic partner used my vulnerability and dependence on him against me so I'd want to remain in the 'relationship', which I guess was an aspect of my life I was familiar with. Here's a fact: a narcissist (narc) will *never, ever* love you, see you as an equal or change his or her attitude – don't think s/he can or will. My partner victimised me for years. I thought I lacked options and resources, but after researching them and drawing on a lot of courage, I got out. Was it easy? *No*, but making everything hard for you is exactly how narcissistic predators work. Don't give up on hope. My narcissistic partner didn't break me, because I refused to let him. If you're in an abusive situation, find the courage to get out.

I have no doubt that stress is a trigger for disease that's caused by people who are diseased and negative.

If I've encouraged anyone reading my story to get out of a domestic narcissistic situation, I've done my job.

Also, I have to admit that writing this memoir triggered a lot of bad memories, some of which I'd buried deep in the back of my mind, and I had a lot of nightmares while revisiting them. Fortunately, however, they've stopped now. Maybe in writing the book I purged myself of them.

## **What do I want from now on?**

I'm optimistic about the future. Who knows what'll unfold or what new pandemic or disease might arise, or what cures might be developed?

I've been through grief, depression and devastation, but I get up every day, while I can.

I've changed as a result of the experience. I don't suffer fools, gossips, liars or useless attention seekers. What I want is a peaceful end to my life, but I neither expect anything nor take anything for granted. Many people are in much worse circumstances, so if you're out there hurting, I hope that in reading this memoir you gain some inspiration for bettering your situation.

Shit happens, but what I've learnt is that you need to believe in yourself, follow your instincts, take care of *yourself*, let everything else follow, and not be hard on yourself so you don't end up losing sight of your goals.

And last, I'm *not* a dunce!



Tracy-lee Adams, designer, creative thinker, author, successful business owner, un-selfish, adaptable, resilient, adventurous, humble, courageous, likeable, sincere, trustworthy, achiever, generous, determined, strong, kind, vivacious, witty, fun-loving, outgoing, enthusiastic, thoughtful, modest, courteous and a prankster to boot.