

# Just Work

An autobiographical account  
of workplace bullying

by  
Kathleen O'Brien



With a foreword by John Bottomley  
Director, Creative Ministries Network

**Creative Ministries Network**  
2004

# JUST WORK:

An autobiographical account of workplace bullying.

By

Kathleen O'Brien

With a foreword by John Bottomley  
Director, Creative Ministries Network

Creative Ministries Network  
2004

Published by  
THE CREATIVE MINISTRIES NETWORK  
P.O. Box 362  
St. Kilda 3182

Telephone (03) 9527 2283  
(03)9827 8322

**JUST WORK: an autobiographical account of workplace bullying**

© Kathleen O'Brien 2004

ISBN

## foreword

Kathy O'Brien contacted our office the morning after the previous evening's television news had reported the launch of our research report Work Factors in Suicide. When you read Kathy's account of years of workplace bullying, you will understand why she rang.

I believe our research gave validation to something Kathy already knew to be true about how work factors can drive people to suicide. This account shows that Kathy had begun to face her demons. In writing this account Kathy's desire was to make a difference for other people stuck in the darkness of violent and abusive work relations.

But the scars resulting from this violence do not heal quickly or easily, and Kathy knew she would need support in sharing her experience with others. Our Network approached St. Kilda-based writer Bronwyn Scanlon to support and facilitate Kathy's writing in a safe and creative environment. Very soon, Kathy's words and feelings began to flow. This was due in no small measure to Bronwyn's skill and empathy.

Kathy's writing captures the jumbled darkness of a chaotic work environment that is based on a culture of violence where respect for the humanity of staff is at a minimum. In this culture, abusive relationships flourished and became the norm. So when the two key women bullies in administration were finally dismissed, others who replaced them quickly 'tuned in' to the culture, perpetuating the systems of abuse and manipulation.

This account is a 'must read' for occupational health and safety professionals and policy makers trained in the engineering school of eliminating the hazard at source. Here, the hazard source is the boss – a man who runs his business by putting people down and fostering favouritism, while seeking the sympathy of his staff as the perpetual victim. Even after four staff from this company have lodged five WorkCover work-related stress claims, and another staff person had submitted a doctor's certificate for stress, the boss seems to avoid investigation or prosecution by WorkSafe. Yet as Kathy's account reveals, the persistent workplace bullying she suffered pushed her to suicidal thinking and soul-destroying depression.

The darkness resulting from this hazardous work environment is gradually revealed as Kathy's reflection and writing leads her to name the events at the heart of her pain. Each section opens a window into her fragmented world. Particularly painful episodes are revisited in flashback over and again, jumping into the narrative without apparent connection. I felt privileged to read my way into such a vivid description of what are classical symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. It is sobering to realise that these symptoms are most often associated with the experience of war veterans and rape victims.

There is another challenge here for the scientific world-view, and the medical-rehabilitation community. The modern world long ago discounted the existence of God as a means of understanding the universe. Yet when the best of modern medicine and workplace rehabilitation had failed to heal Kathy's pain, and she felt alone in the darkness of her despair, it was her persistent prayer of lament that opened her heart to seek God's healing grace. Kathy's account of being enfolded by God's Holy Spirit is a parable of God's desire for relationships in life and work that are grounded in love and justice.

Kathy's boss saw his staff as 'just workers' and treated them accordingly. The God Kathy met in her 'dark night of the soul' is concerned about just work – work grounded in just relationships, and has treated her accordingly. The difference is stark. When human beings are treated as 'just workers', the path leads to exploitation, corrupt relations, spiritual and sadly, physical death. But when human beings are treated with justice at work, the path leads to life and creativity.

The future of workplace health and safety needs to listen to those who have suffered from workplace violence and bullying, because in their accounts of injustice we are able to see what justice requires. Further, in accounts such as the one offered here by Kathy O'Brien, we learn of those moments where support, healing and transformation break through the darkness. We can see that God's grace is a present and persistent truth, seeking to become concrete in our world of work.

I wish to acknowledge the funding support of the St. George's East St. Kilda Uniting Church for this project. St. George's financial support for the Creative Ministries Network is a significant act of solidarity with people who experience injustice at work, and a valued testimony to God's healing grace in work and life. Margaret Neith's art work for the cover of this report resonates with the compelling story that unfolds inside.

John Bottomley

Director, Creative Ministries Network

2004.

## contents

foreword	3
contents	5
prologue	6
in the beginning	7
the workplace environment	11
a thumbnail sketch of the workplace bullies	13
the tell-tale signs	18
a typical day	20
the staff meet reception	29
harassment	44
things that didn't add up	45
secrets and surveillance	58
the crow's nest	60
and the walls came tumbling down	62
cat amongst the pigeons	64
fraud	65
return to work	66
back home	72
workplace meetings	75
the court hearing	79
healing	80
feeling better (pulled out ... thank God!)	81
back in control	84
the madhouse again	86
round two - making a claim	88
conciliation	91
behind the scenes	99
appendices	101
appendix one: the holy water	101
appendix two: peer support	103
appendix three: david's reflections	104
appendix four: letters from Kathy	105

## prologue

**My world today is so extremely different from that black place I once lived in. I woke everyday to a nothing world. I had to struggle through the day. False smiles, false laughter and always so concerned that someone might see through the shattered glass around me. I carried such a heavy burden.**

*Each morning I had to work out my day. I had to try to remember during the day how I had to act. I had to be careful what I said in case something nutty came out of my mouth and then have to look at that person's face, knowing what the look was about. That puzzled look on their face trying to understand, knowing that something was not right. I had anger outbursts. I knew there was no reason but I could no longer control my rage. I tried to control my hype but everything and nothing made sense. So much humiliation, embarrassment, loss of dignity yet that was the least of my problems.*

*I existed in a world of my own behind a glass wall that detached me from the real world. I had to hide this madness through comic humour and laughter. Laughing at myself and everything else. This I found could put others at ease and obscure the state of my mind. This was the way I was able to get through the day. At night was the blackest time. There was nowhere to hide, nothing to laugh at. Just reality. A mind that made no sense, a blackness that would creep over me. I wanted no more future in this ugly world. It was a split life and a lie.*

**Nothing was reality, everything was hidden and no one else was in this world with me. It was so lonely, so frightening. Not even sleep could take me out of it.**

*All night tossing and turning, living the day once again, over and over. Then morning would come and the struggle started again. The night would set in again always hiding my secret till the black hole was too deep to climb out of and the only peace I could imagine was to be gone. The thought of this peace was so welcoming that nothing mattered any more.*

## **in the beginning**

*I was employed as a Receptionist at Lodown in September 1993. I was 38 years old and married with two children. I remember my first day. It was a Wednesday and I had to start at 9.30am. I arrived at the front door very excited, as it was a very impressive looking building. The front doors opened and I walked into a large foyer consisting of blue stone around all the walls and beautiful green palms. To my right was a brass staircase that led up to the Reception area. There were adjacent offices beside the Reception. From behind the Reception desk, a dark haired lady smiled at me (she would have been about my age). She was the lady that I was replacing. She asked me to sit down then she got up and left the Reception.*

A few minutes later the main door to the office opened and Alison appeared. Alison had interviewed me. She smiled and asked me to come in. She seemed very pleasant. She was also my age and had short blond tipped hair. As I walked in I saw a large lady sitting at her desk. She looked at me and said "Hello." Alison introduced us and her name was Ruby. She didn't have much to say. Then she brought me around to the Reception and introduced me to the Receptionist. Her name was Trudy. She then asked Trudy to get me a chair and to begin to teach me the job. Trudy smiled and got another chair for me to sit down on. Time went by and she began to teach me about the costings and the switchboard.

I noticed that there was a lot of paging going on and phones ringing everywhere. Quite loud and noisy for a Reception. I could see Ruby from where I was sitting. Her desk was aligned with mine. I heard the front door open and someone walking up the stairs. A short bearded man appeared at the top of the staircase. He had a bunch of flowers in his hand. He walked over to the Reception and handed them to Trudy. I remember thinking how sad he looked. Trudy thanked him and introduced me to him "Hans this is Kathy." I smiled and he nodded. "Pleased to met you." No smile but still very pleasant. He walked into his office, which was the first office adjacent to the Reception area.

Time passed and Ruby came up to me and told me she would take me downstairs to the factory to introduce me. We walked down a hallway that led to a large door. Ruby opened the door which led to a set of stairs down to the factory floor. I tried to make conversation with Ruby but she didn't seem very interested in talking to me. We reached the factory floor and there were a number of cubicles and each guy had a work-table. As she began to introduce me, I noticed that no one had much to say. She would say, "This is Kathy." Then "This is Peter." They would all smile and nod their heads at me and we would move on to the next person. We passed by an office, which seemed to be the Production office. I noticed a lady sitting behind a desk but wondered why Ruby didn't introduce me to her. She

seemed to be very busy. We went back up the stairs and back to the Reception. I sat back down beside Trudy and Ruby went back to her desk.

I noticed that Trudy would page every call she received over the PA to the appropriate employee. Ruby would answer calls that were coming in too from her desk. It seemed strange to me as I was of the opinion that a receptionist would answer all the calls. I noticed when Ruby answered and paged, her voice seemed very loud. I began to do some costings and talk to Trudy and asked how long she had been there. She answered "six months" and that was it. No more said. About ten minutes went by then I heard this almighty loud man's voice yelling through the intercom where Ruby sat.

Ruby. Ruby.

Yes Joe

What the bloody hell do you think you are doing?

What do you mean?

You bloody well introduce Kathy to everyone and you totally ignore Li and Yu. They bloody well work for me and they are every bit as good as anyone.

I didn't mean to miss them.

The boys told me you did, so don't bloody well do it again.

He slammed the phone down.

I saw Ruby go running into Alison's office. She was upset. I heard them both bitching. She came out. Her face, angry.

They're nothing but a bunch of arseholes.

I looked at Trudy but she seemed to have no reaction to it.

The day went on with the calls and paging going on all the time and Ruby answering the calls too. It was all so very noisy.

I left at 4pm along with Trudy.

Next day I arrived at 9.00am. Trudy was already at the Reception. I sat down beside her. Ruby was at her desk. Ten minutes later Alison came up the stairs. "Morning" "Morning" we both said. She looked at us and said "Morning." She went through the door and into her office.

When Alison arrived Ruby got up from her desk and went into Alison's office. They always talked very low almost in a whisper and there never seemed to be a lot of staff around.

I tried on a couple of occasions to find out from Trudy why she was leaving. She would just answer, "The job isn't for me." She didn't have much conversation with Alison or Ruby either. From time to time a very loud voice would yell over the intercom switch. I asked Trudy "Who was that?" She said "It's Joe. He is the Managing Director." It was the same voice I heard yelling through the intercom in the office but I hadn't been introduced to him yet. "And who is Hans?" I asked. "He is the General Manager."

The day continued as usual. Lunchtime came and Trudy had lunch away from the office. Ruby told me I could have lunch with her and Alison. We sat at Ruby's desk and she answered the incoming calls while we had lunch. They asked me the usual questions about my family. Lunchtime ended and Trudy came back to Reception and continued to teach me the switch and costings.

There wasn't any morning or afternoon tea but I could get myself a cup of tea at the tearoom whenever I wanted. You could walk into the tearoom through the main office. The other staff used another door at the end. If any staff member was in the tearoom they would introduce themselves to me and tell me where they worked but they would never acknowledge Ruby or Alison. I would see Ruby on a number of occasions watching everything that went on.

Later in the afternoon I was standing beside Ruby's desk talking to Alison. The door flew open and a tall man walked in. He had a goatee and short hair. Rugged looking. He was about 45 years old. Alison looked up and said. "Joe this is Kathy. She is replacing Trudy." He gave me a big smile. I liked him straight away. I smiled and said "Hello" He seemed to be in a rush. He looked at Alison "Alison could I see you in your office." "Sure" and they both walked into Alison's office and shut the door. I went back to the Reception and sat down. The calls continued as usual. Then the Reception intercom beeped and a lady's voice said, "Are you there, Trudy?" Trudy quickly picked up the telephone so that the conversation was not heard over the intercom. She immediately turned her back on me and was whispering into the telephone. The phone would ring and Ruby would answer the calls while Trudy was talking. All I could hear was whispering. It all seemed so strange to me. Anyway the day ended and Trudy and I left.

Friday morning came. Trudy and I were at Reception and the front door opened. I knew it was Ruby, as she seemed to struggle to get up the stairs. You could hear her breathing. She reached the top of the

stairs “Morning.” “Morning” we said. I asked Trudy where Alison was and she said that Alison didn’t work on Fridays.

The usual thing continued, paging, staff paging other staff. Joe’s loud voice through the intercom asking Trudy to get companies for him. Lunchtime arrived and Trudy got up from her chair. Ruby was at her desk. Trudy said to her, “I’m going out to lunch and I will probably be back a bit late.” Ruby looked up at her. “Yeah,” then she put her head down again. I stayed at the Reception as it wasn’t quite lunchtime yet.

When Trudy left I heard Ruby pick up her phone. “Hi it’s me. She’s going out for lunch with the rest of them” “Yeah, Yeah.” “She said she might be back late.” “Yeah what a cheek. She better make up the time.” “Yeah I know” “Okay bye” and she hung up. It seemed so strange to me. She didn’t even try to hide the fact that she was bitching about Trudy.

I had lunchtime with Ruby making small conversation. I asked her why Trudy was leaving. She said that they had to put her off because she wasn’t coping with the workload. I went back to Reception when lunchtime was over and began to answer the switch. Trudy arrived about half an hour late. She would never say much to me or give me any information. I really didn’t care and to be honest I wasn’t interested. Four o’clock arrived and she wished me all the best. She was a very nice lady. She got up from her chair and turned to Ruby and said. “Goodbye Ruby.” Ruby looked and said. “Yeah see ya.” I got up and said goodbye to Ruby. “I’ll see you on Monday. “Yeah see you Monday”. I walked out and into my car.

Something seemed very strange about this place but I decided whatever it was I wasn’t going to get involved in it. I would just do my job and go home. I knew I would enjoy the work involved.

## the workplace environment

I approach the workplace as if it were a fish bowl. It seems clear, at first. I like the look of it. I think to myself, "I could be happy here". Then a fish jumps out. It seems so desperate to get out. This was the fish I replaced.

I go inside. It all seems normal. I feel at ease. I note a slight tension between the other fish. They seem to avoid the cave with the shark and the suckerfish. The suckerfish puzzles me. So insignificant but so much to say. They stick together. The suckerfish takes me down to the cave. She is out of her depth. She wants to be with the shark. She is so uneasy and the other fish avoid her.

I know something is wrong. Time passes and I start to see what is happening. So much tension. I get caught in this tension. This tension turns into a nightmare. The water turns murky. I am suffocating. I can't get out. I'm in too deep. It takes all my strength. The shark and the suckerfish are gone. It doesn't help me. The damage is done.

**I travel deeper and deeper into this murky water. Everyone around me is suffering. I'm so weak. I can't survive anymore. Then through some miracle I am outside the fish bowl. I look in. It isn't clear anymore. It is filthy. Slime has grown on the sides. Fish desperately trying to get oxygen. They sit at the bottom of the bowl with all the strength they have left. I want to help them but no one wants to know. No one will listen. It's just too much trouble to clean this cesspool up.**

I, like everyone else, begin to turn my back on them. As I turn I notice something in the bowl move. I look inside. It is the dolphin. He is still jumping the hoops. Having so much fun. Totally oblivious to what is going on in the fish bowl around him.

**Let me introduce you to my colleagues. My colleagues as sea creatures:**

*Hans.* Hans is a Stingray. Not because of the word "sting" but because of the way he quietly glides watching, quietly working things out. Never losing his temper but instead gliding round and round trying to change things quietly and never outwardly making a lot of waves but he will never give up. A quiet achiever.

*Joe.* Is a dolphin. Such fun, so likeable. Ready to play with anyone as long as things are OK, he is happy jumping through the rings taking other fish for a ride. The world is so wonderful. Not a care. 'I'm happy, why can't you all be?'

*Alison.* Alison is a dangerous shark – such teeth. She will snap at anything passing. So many fish to eat. She is so ugly but thinks she is so beautiful. Don't cross her path or her territory you will not survive if you do.

***Ruby.* Ruby is the fish that rides on the shark. She needs the protection of the shark. Just going along for the ride. So safe to stay on its back. Stick like glue and she has total protection. Fall off and she is so deep in the ocean, so lost. Can't swim. Desperate for the shark to come back but the shark doesn't care about her. 'You fell off' says the shark. 'Survive your own way. Don't tell me your troubles'.**

*Me.* I'm a shellfish. I just want peace and quiet. To stick my head out and have a sticky beak to see what's happening in the world. Maybe come out for play with a few cheeky fish - enjoy the day. Then when I'm ready, go back into my shell where no one can hurt me and I'm safe in my little home. Just a little shell amongst the fish in the ocean. In a natural, healthy environment I would be a beautiful, colourful clown fish. Have a laugh, swim around, not harm anyone. Not a threat to anyone.

## **a thumbnail sketch of the workplace bullies**

Alison was a very solid and large lady. She had short blonde tipped hair. She had a very large nose and funny enough, one of the things she did was to stick her nose up in the air and go about saying: "Can you smell that?" "Can you smell that?"

She had complete control of the accounts and was accountable to no one. She was a creature of habit and found any change hard to take. Her account system was back in the seventies for more reasons than one. She never worked on Fridays and even if the doors had to close she would not give up that day for anyone.

When I first started she would keep Ruby under control to a certain degree. The last two to three years she let her do what she wanted. I realize now it was to draw attention to Ruby and not to what she was hiding. Everything she did had an ulterior motive.

**She was from a quite well off family - they own Plutron. She thought she was above everyone and would say things like "I have no time for white trash." She was a 'total watcher'. She would thrive on gossip about anyone yet you would never hear anything about her life that wasn't good. She would brag about and exaggerate things and you better sit and listen and believe her or payback would be on the way. She had a tongue so sharp that she could slice you in two.**

She was a compulsive liar and would steal coffee, pens, paper, get her Xmas cards on Lodon. She would not put herself out for anyone. The only time she did was at Xmas to get the Xmas liquor. Guess why?

She stole a lot of money from every corner she could. Extra Super, made up bogus employees, paid herself overtime. She always had cash delivered for paydays. Her kids would come in during school holidays and she put them on the payroll and paid them holiday pay. The list goes on and on. I would write out the monthly cheques and she would tell me to skip a couple of blank cheques and she worked on four different chequebooks for the two companies, jumping dates.

I would ask Ruby why she did this and Ruby would shrug her shoulders. She worked in total chaos with the invoices so as to hide anything she ordered for herself. When Joe would go on holidays or away she would get him to sign blank cheques. She also had the authority to sign for both the Companies.

The last year she worked there she bought herself a Mercedes Benz. It was her crowning glory. I knew that Hans was convinced that somehow she had bought it through Lodown. One day she came in with another Mercedes and I asked her about it. She said "Oh that belongs to Henry" Her husband. I later found out that her car was being serviced and it was on loan. There was so much I found out when she left. They had so much on her yet all it took was one day knowing that the Police were going to charge Ruby and it was dropped like a hot potato.

She managed to keep Ruby under control by giving her bonuses - letting her have petrol etc. and over the years the amount was a lot but nothing compared to Alison. I think I was very lucky because at one stage on three consecutive paydays she paid me overtime. I approached her and told her she had made a mistake, and she said 'keep it as a bonus', and I truly believed she had the authority to do this. I remember I upset her about something trivial and that was the end of that. Thank goodness, as I would have been involved and completely innocent.

Her day mainly consisted of first thing in the morning bitching with Ruby. This would go on for one hour or two hours. Then telephone conversations most of the day followed by long games of solitaire. Ruby would say the only work she did was once a month balancing up the accounts and that was with Ruby's help.

Ruby and Alison had a love/hate relationship. Alison knew Ruby for about thirteen years yet Ruby was never permitted to go past Alison's front door.

She totally manipulated Joe. She would tell Joe that Hans was trying to destroy the Co. She would call him up to her office some Wednesdays and tell him that there was not enough money to pay wages. Priscilla - Joe's wife - told me Joe would go home and not have any sleep worrying about payday, then on the Thursday morning she would tell him that she had solved the problem. He truly thought he could not be without them.

She thrived on her sickness. She was always at the Doctors. We would all have to sit and listen to every detail. She had a thyroid operation years before, and that is all you heard about.

Henry was her husband. Boy was he frightened of her. I remember Ruby saying that she had taken his Co. to court for an ankle injury and had been given quite a lot in compensation. (He was a footballer) Anyway the Co. started giving him a hard time and he wanted to leave. She told him he could not leave unless they sacked him. (Another case on the way for unfair dismissal) Anyway he came in one day and had walked out. Everything was quiet about the job he had after this. Paul told me he had seen Henry driving a school bus. One night we were all out for Xmas and Lucy's husband asked Henry what he did for a living. His reply was "Transport Consultant." I nearly fell off my chair.

Just before I walked out I was beginning to get set up. I had to do the green books every day and Alison started to tell me not to worry about doing them. I told her I was behind and she told me not to worry. They used this against me and other things because by this time I was starting to make mistakes because of the harassment and this was exactly where they wanted me. Even though Ruby was the one that came down heavy on me I knew that Alison was behind it too but she was too cunning. I remember one day I came back to the office and heard Alison say, "Is she back yet?" I asked, "What do you mean by that?" And she responded in a way that was quite out of character. She said, "Nothing" and went straight into her office.

Alison's kids were just wonderful and so smart. Troy was always going to be a pilot. He didn't make it. Instead he became an apprentice plumber. But of course he was the best apprentice they ever had. I remember on his 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday party they had on a boat. She told us that she was not going to invite her sister and his son. Her sister's son was very handsome but had something wrong with his mind. She invited everyone in the family but them and said she didn't care if her sister never spoke to her again because her son would embarrass them having him there. There was another time when her mum had upset her. She did not speak to her for three months. Her mum would ring work and I would tell Alison who it was. She would reply, 'tell her I'm not available'.

She was so strange. There are a number of things I could tell you about but if something came up that she wanted to be true she would lie about it and in the end she really seemed to believe it. We all had to sit and listen to these lies and God help anyone who questioned. I did one time and I was put in my place very quickly.

On Fridays Ruby would let her guard down and tell us things. I guess she needed to get it out too because she got the full brunt of it all.

All the money Alison stole, yet she would go to Joe and tell him about any of the Sales men who spent extra on anything - usually ten to fifteen dollars - and they would have to pay this money back.

She was so cold. I remember one morning Lucy got a call from her husband and started crying and walked out of the office. I went after Lucy and she told me that her husband had had a mild heart attack. When I went back to the main office Alison asked me what was wrong and I told her. She immediately told me to tell Lucy to 'go home and don't be carrying on like that at work, we all have our problems, and don't come back till she stopped carrying on'.

She did some terrible things to the staff. Michael Davies on a couple of occasions put his car on the nature strip. She went and made a phone call to the local Council and told them to send down a Traffic Officer and told them she worked in the street and complained. Sure enough the Officer arrived and I watched her stand there with a smirk on her face watching what went on.

Both Ruby and Alison loved to make trouble, not only at work but with people they came into contact with such as Clients. One day Ruby slammed the phone down and yelled out to Alison how rude some woman was to her. They both sat writing out a letter to the company saying that she was rude and had no idea how to act professionally. When they left I was down the Bank and they all knew the two of them. One of the ladies said that she had short-changed them forty cents in the pay. Alison had rung her Superior and complained and demanded that she come up and give them the forty cents - which the teller did.

She knew Hans was on to her and she hated him. She would come in the morning and would yell out to Ruby that someone had been on her computer. I noticed towards the end that she was acting very strange and agitated if anything was going on in the boardroom. She was erratic and would constantly come to me and ask: "Can you hear anything?" "Can you hear anything?"

Sometimes she was completely removed from reality because she wanted things to be more dramatic. There was an occasion where the Office had been broken into. They had taken some petty cash and a couple of pay packets. Joe suspected a certain employee. But Alison had herself convinced that it was Business Espionage and she would shuffle through files trying to find some evidence. I remember Ruby would walk out of Alison's office rolling her eyes, but of course she had no option but to agree.

One day, one of the girl's who delivered down the factory had told Joe that she was leaving because she was pregnant. Joe agreed with her and also there was not much work. She went into Alison's office and Ruby was there also. By the time she had walked out they had her convinced that she could go for unfair dismissal and had changed the situation completely. Sure enough it went to Court but was dismissed

I remember one day Priscilla, Joe's wife, came up to talk to Alison about something. When she had gone Alison came running into the main office insisting that Priscilla looked like she had had cheek implants. She went on and on and you know that next morning she came in saying that she had gone to the doctor's that night (the doctor was a friend) and had asked to see pictures and found out what was involved in the operation. All day she kept saying "I knew she had. I knew she had." She also used to tell everyone that Priscilla was an ex call girl. (See Appendix 3 for a more detailed description of Alison's character.)

One more other thing you might get a laugh out of. The guys in the factory used to call the office they worked in "the crocodile pit." Whenever one of them had to go there the others would ask them if they had a couple of chickens to feed them. Everyone avoided the main office.

I would describe Ruby's appearance on first sight as an extremely fat woman with bulging eyes and an overbite that made her teeth protrude. She wobbled as she walked. Her hair was fair. She wore large clothes that hid the many rolls. She would struggle to get up and down the stairs, holding onto the side

rails for support. She was very aware of her size. She was always careful when she ate her lunch. She would eat slowly but often. I knew that she would have loved to stuff everything in at once.

**You could not miss her because her voice was a continued loud tone. She would yell about anything and always about someone else so that everyone could hear. Her main aim was to see and bring to peoples' attention the faults in others. She would continually say the same things on a regular basis – day after day. Things like, 'Jesus Christ, men should be put down at birth'. Or just sigh loudly, over and over. (Once I counted 45 sighs in ninety minutes).**

She was good at her job. She wanted to feel that Lodown needed her and could not operate if she wasn't there. Yet she would do things like slam phones down and swear at the same time. And fight with clients over the phone. She would pay back anyone that pushed her. She would continually bitch to Alison and would set people up to cause trouble. The only person she liked was Joe. She would laugh loudly at anything he said. And she fancied John, so she was nice to him. But otherwise, she generally loved to humiliate anyone she could. She would continually shake her head at anyone. She would slam doors and kick filing cabinets. No one could compete with her yelling at them, instead they stormed out of the office.

She loved drama and attention. She would react in extreme ways if something went wrong in her life. And she would sit for hours trying to find anything she could on someone and then would love to present it to Joe. Except Fridays. She would be okay to everyone on Fridays because Alison did not work on Fridays. But if anything happened she would inform Alison by phone. On Monday mornings, she and Alison would discuss Friday's activities. Not work, but people. What 'they' did and what 'they' said. Still, on Friday you would see the soft-hearted person (which she kept from Alison). She could see through Alison and on a few occasions would let her guard down to me.

The main thing I would say is she liked to think people were fools. She had a hatred of men. She even hated God saying, "He's an asshole, he has never done anything for me."

## **the tell-tale signs**

**I think the first sign that I noticed was the back-biting that was going on the first day. There seemed to be a lot of secrecy.**

The receptionist who was leaving was whispering into the telephone. So many quiet moments and looks. The flowers Hans had in his hand when I saw him walking up the stairs. He said nothing much to Trudy, just handed them to her. Ruby had no conversation with her. Then lunchtime came and Trudy told Ruby that she was going out for lunch with everyone and would be back late.

As soon as she left the building Ruby picked up the phone and I knew it was Alison she was talking to. Alison at home. Ruby saying “She’s gone out for lunch with them. Says she will be back late. She had better make up the time or else.” Then “Yeah. I know. That’s right.”

She put the phone down and said nothing. Trudy walked back in and not a word from Ruby. They don’t speak to each other. Then it was time to go home. Trudy said goodbye. Ruby just stuck her head up and grunted. I said goodbye. She said, “Good Luck”. I remember wondering what was wrong but whatever was wrong it was not my business. Little did I know what I had in store for me.

Then the next day arrived. Alison was quite pleasant. I liked her. She seemed very nice and I felt at ease. Ruby was not so bad either. Although I started to notice that a few things seemed strange. There wasn’t many staff around the office and there was a lot of whispering going on between Ruby and Alison. I still didn’t care.

I noticed that Ruby had a very loud voice and that they both rung up friends a lot during the day. It didn’t seem to bother either of them. I began to sense something was wrong. People in this place were not very friendly to me. It seemed strange. Then Alison asked Ruby to take me down to the factory and introduce me to everyone. She introduced me to the guys on the factory floor. They smiled at me and I noticed Ruby showed hardly any emotion.

There was not much happiness there. Not much laughter.

We got back to the office and I heard this loud yelling voice scream over the PA at Ruby. It was Joe.

Ruby. Ruby.

Yes Joe.

What the bloody hell do you think you are doing?

What do you mean?

You bloody well introduce Kathy to everyone and you totally ignore Yu and Li. They bloody well work for me and they are every bit as good as anyone.

I didn't mean to miss them.

The boys told me you did, so don't bloody well do it again.

The door slammed. Ruby went running into Alison's office. She was upset. I heard them both bitching. She came out. Her face, angry.

They're nothing but a bunch of arseholes.

As the day wore on I saw more and more. And, I saw the constant anger emanating from Ruby and her voice ...that haunts me to this day.

I noticed that Joe called Ruby 'Rubena' on a few occasions.

I walked into the tearoom and as I walked out I said to Ruby:

Rubena could you show me...

Whatever.

She turned around and yelled at me.

Don't call me Rubena. Only my friends call me Rubena. My name is Ruby and don't forget it.

I felt quite stunned.

## a typical day

Each morning I would do my usual routine and go into Production. I didn't know Colleen very well but I liked her, she seemed very 'straight forward' and said what she thought. She worked in the same office as Joe. At different times I would go down and she would be having a laugh with Joe and a few of the other staff. They seemed to have a bit of fun but at other times Joe would be screaming at someone and she would just continue to do her work and staff would walk in and out with no expression and continue on their way.

Morning everyone. How are you?

Colleen would look around.

Morning.

The door would open. It was usually Peter Hill. He was wiry and about fifty and talked with a lisp.

Hi Peter. Hi Kathy.

He looked at me and said on a few occasions.

Another week in the crocodile pit. We brought some chickens into work to throw them into the office.

Everyone would laugh. I would laugh too but not too much, as I didn't want to encourage too much conversation. I was always careful not to rubbish Ruby and Alison as I didn't want to be involved in the fighting that was going on.

Then back up stairs, open the doors, and sit behind the Reception. I was beginning to get to know a few of the staff that worked in the programming. Mohammad, John the Salesman, and Craig - but they would only come and talk to me for a few minutes in the mornings. Craig would come up with his mug of tea. I began to get to know him. Craig would say:

I wonder what those two will be up to today.

Craig they never stop they just are out to make everyone's life hell.

Why doesn't Joe do something about them?

Craig said, "For years he has had clients complain about Ruby's attitude but he says that she is a single mother and feels sorry for her". We continue just talking general conversation and he would go back down to his Office.

I would hear the front door open and Hans would appear at the top of the stairs, turn to me and say good morning to me, and go about his business, never saying a lot. Ruby and Alison also had arguments with him. Alison would take his car spot every time she had an opportunity, as she didn't like leaving her car beside the factory staff. She would always come in between 5 past 9 and ¼ past 9 never at the same time as the plebs.

On different occasions Hans would tell Ruby to stop yelling but it never seemed to make any difference. During this time the unfair dismissal agreement came into effect. As I got to know Alison a bit better I began to realize that she was a terrible snob and looked down her nose at people. She really thought she was above everyone. She had a bit of money behind her and was from a well off family. Her husband's name was Henry and from the things Alison would say it was quite obvious that Henry had to 'toe the line'. Alison had not spoken to his family for a number of years and from what I could gather from Ruby on Fridays, he wouldn't dare. She always loved to talk about how well off she was. I would catch Ruby on a number of times rolling her eyes. Alison loved to talk about "white trash." Through time I could see that she could be a very dangerous woman. I remember one time she was looking out of the window and Michael Davies had his car on the nature strip. She turned around to Ruby and said, "Watch this." She then rang the local council, told them she worked in the street, and complained to them that she didn't approve of it. Sure enough half hour later there was the Inspector around his car.

I looked at her. She stood looking out the window with a smirk on her face. She would often have Joe in her office with the door shut and he would come out looking so worried. It would usually be on a Wednesday the day before payday. I later learnt from Priscilla, Joe's wife, (who also worked delivering items on a part time basis) that Alison would tell him that there wasn't enough money for the wages. Apparently Joe would not sleep that night and on Thursday she would call him up and tell him that she had somehow managed to get enough money. He could always depend on her.

I began to see the lies that she would come out with. So blatant about things that went on in her life and the two of us would have to sit and listen and never, never question them. I did one time and she put me in my place with a razor blade tongue. Ruby would never question her and she got the brunt of it because of their friendship, which in itself was so strange. A real love-hate relationship.

The months turned into years and between the fifth and sixth years my health went down hill. Ruby's yelling and the arguments that were going on around me were starting to get to me. I would wake up at night and hear her voice yelling in my head and I was scratching my neck. I began to have so many sleepless nights - all I could hear was this voice piercing in my head. I asked her on a couple of occasions to be quiet because it was getting to me and she would just look at me and say nothing and continue. I went to Alison on one occasion and told her and I noticed Ruby was a bit quieter, but not for long.

I knew by this time that I was never ever to go above Alison's head and talk to Joe. She was office manager and don't forget it. I could tell that Ruby was very weary of Alison too. You would never question anything she said. She was too dangerous.

Such terrible arguments and yelling that went on... it never stopped. Alison was backing Ruby all the time and screaming at employees too. I began to take a diary, as I knew if anything happened no one would believe the conduct of this woman.

I eventually went to see Dr. Pilger and asked for some nerve tablets to try to calm me down a bit and help me sleep. I knew my health was beginning to be affected. I had a word one night with my husband and told him that I was going to look for another job. So I began to get *The Age* every week but unfortunately I didn't know how to use a computer, and had not learnt it at Lodown as it was all run manually. There just wasn't anything I could go for as all the ads required computer experience. I searched for months. I couldn't leave as I had a mortgage and was putting my children through secondary school. It took me six months to get this job.

The workload began to increase so another lady was employed on a part time basis. She was about 45 years old and as time went on I got to know her better. She was a very gentle lady, softly spoken. She would come in about two to three days a week to do the invoicing that Ruby usually did. She soon learned through time that she was not permitted to have a lot of conversation with me. Ruby would watch us all the time.

I had a day off work as I was too stressed to face Lodown and I rang Alison and asked her to tell Joe that I was being affected by Ruby. She told me she wouldn't bother him and said, "I think it is just you're cholesterol." I hung up and went to bed.

Hans started a business as an offshoot in IT and employed computer technicians. There was a meeting going on in the Boardroom. Alison and Ruby were having arguments with Hans. Eventually I found out that Hans wanted to change the manual system in the main office to computer. Alison and Ruby did everything they could to block it. During this time both Alison and Ruby's behaviour became so extreme. Ruby was out of control and Alison almost encouraged it. They completely joined forces but Alison's behaviour was so extreme. She did and said things that made no sense. The whispering got worse and worse. They both became nothing short of vicious.

There were times when I would write out the cheques. She would fold a few over and tell me to skip a few cheques in the sequence. I asked Ruby what the reason would be - she just shrugged her shoulders.

Ruby began to watch me all the time, making sure I didn't talk to anyone. But I was beginning to know the other staff members and they would ring up through the intercom and have a joke with me - including Joe. I would look at Ruby and she would be staring at me. She also had free reign to treat

people with such disrespect. So many complaints were put in about her but nothing was ever done about it. Hans tried but it made no difference. She would be quiet for a few days then back to the same conduct.

Monday morning, 8.00am. I arrived at Lodown. I walked in through the Factory. I saw Bill.

Morning Bill. How are you?

Yeah, good Kathy.

I waved to different staff and smiled. They smiled back. I went to dispatch to pick up my costings. Colleen was at her desk. Phillip was there too and Joe was on the phone. He was talking to a customer. His voice, always loud but jolly.

Morning everyone. How are you?

Colleen looked around.

Morning.

I liked Colleen, she said what she thought and wasn't intimidated by anyone. I tried to avoid conversations that went on for a long time. The door opened. It was Peter Hill. He was wiry and about fifty and talks with a lisp.

Hi Peter.

Hi Kathy.

He looked at me and said with a smile:

Another week in the crocodile pit. We brought some chickens into work to throw them into the office.

Everyone laughed. I laughed too but not too much as things were bad enough for me. I was always careful not to rubbish Ruby and Alison. Joe was still talking. I grabbed my costings and walked up the corridor.

Morning Everyone.

I stuck my head into the Gallus room.

Morning Mick.

Morning Kathy

I opened the front door with my keys and went upstairs to reception, and signed in. You have no idea the big deal this stupid book was to the both of them. I opened the door to the main office, the door to the kitchen, and Alison's office. Usually someone was in the tearoom.

Morning everyone.

Morning Kathy.

I put my things at my desk and went to get a cup of tea.

By this time John, Mohammed, and Derek were in the tearoom. They stirred each other. I really enjoyed this. We laughed but I was careful not to get to know them too well. I could be friendly with John, the Salesman, as Ruby and Alison liked John.

I answered calls, paged. And went back to my desk.

Mohammed came out to talk to me. I really liked Mohammed. He was much younger than me but we got on quite well. People were getting to know me so they took the time in the morning to talk to me when they arrived.

Craig walked up the stairs. He hated the two of them too. He looked around.

Morning

Hi Craig

He went down to his office. Mohammed was talking to me and Craig came up to Reception. 'Another week, ha. I wondered what these two would be up to'. I trusted Craig. He had had terrible fights with both Alison and Ruby. John was in his office. He yelled out some smart comment. We laugh. They both said, 'Catch ya'. And walk away.

As time wore on, the program guys signed in, usually making a comment about this book. They all knew the trouble Ruby and Alison caused. Mick was signing in one day and he said to me:

I had a dream last night and Ruby said something to me about the book, and I smashed it in her face. Isn't that sad?

I nodded.

Lucy came in on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I would hear the main door slide open and someone coming up the stairs. It was Hans. He never seemed very happy and I didn't know him much but we understood each other after the talk we had. Because all this time I kept to myself and didn't say anything about the two of them, I think he thought I was with them... but he knows now. He looked around.

Morning.

Morning Hans.

He opened his door and went inside. I heard the front door open again. I heard 'puff, puff, sigh', then I saw her hanging onto the brass staircase dragging herself up. She looked at me.

Morning.

'Morning', I say.

She came over to the Reception and studied the book carefully. Then she signed both her name and Alison's. It was always one rule for them and another for everyone else. She walked through the door and got to her desk and thumped down onto her chair. I answered the calls. She organised herself. I heard the door again. I knew it was Alison - she always just about ran up the stairs.

Alison always came in between 9.05 and 9.15 as she was Queen Bee and didn't come in the same time as the peasants. She was above them.

'Morning', she says.

Morning.

She was dirty she didn't get to the car space before Hans. She loved to put her car in Hans' space to annoy him. She knew not to sign the book. The reason Ruby signed in for her is because if she signs on herself someone might come in before her at 9.05 and she would have to write her correct time in. This was the type of thing that continually went on between them.

Anyway, there was paging going on continually by staff members to each other over the PA, to get Curtis & Co to go here and there, or contact each other. Joe started yelling over the switch.

Get me Curtis & Co

And slammed the phone down. There were two staff members in the tearoom, Derek and Mohammed. Ruby got up and closed the door after looks were exchanged. She walked away. 'Bloody dickheads'. She started shaking her head from side to side. And said, 'I'm surrounded by fools.' All her actions and sayings were repeated continually. Alison went into in her office and straight to the computer. Ruby went back to her desk. I got Curtis & Co and paged Joe. 'Joe. Curtis on line 8.'

I heard Alison. 'Ruby'.

Yeah...

Someone's been into my computer. I bet its Hans.

Ruby got up and went into her office and they start whispering and bitching. They talked quietly and I answered calls. By this time, I dreaded the thought of someone ringing with an invoice being sent to them. My costings were spot on, but my concentration for codes done manually was slipping. There weren't a lot but Ruby would make such a thing of it.

I hadn't done the green books for weeks. Every time I started to do them Alison told me to leave them. I tried to explain that I was behind but she told me not to bother doing them. I didn't realise at the time that I was beginning to get set up.

After a time, Ruby walked out of Alison's office and sat down. She started yelling out something to Alison. She would answer calls if I was talking on the phone. She had to hear her voice. I often wished she would not answer them. It would have been a lot quieter. Everyone tried to avoid coming into the office. Ruby would yell out to Alison. It was usually something that had been on the news. Alison would come out and stand beside Ruby's desk. I'd joined in the conversation. (It was about a recent crime that was still unsolved). There were no 'ifs' or 'buts'. They knew without doubt who killed him and who was involved. They went over and over things. Ruby swore and talked very loudly all the time. Of course everyone was a dickhead. There was never any silence at all with Ruby.

She was always yelling, paging, slamming phones down and continually calling people 'idiots' 'dickheads' then sighing and yelling out to Alison. The clients were also dickheads. John came out of his office and made a smart comment to me:

Looking good Kathy.

Yeah right John.

He walked into the office. John was a typical salesman. Very likeable - about fifty, slender, balding. Ruby enjoyed his company and so did Alison. He started stirring and joking. I stuck my head around and joined in.

He really brightened up the day. Ruby laughed at him and so did I, but of course Ruby's laugh was so loud. Then he would go and sit down in Alison's office and talk. Alison could get 'info' from him but I knew he wasn't that silly. He would only tell her what he wanted her to know. I got up and got myself a cuppa, making sure not to be too friendly if anyone was in the tearoom. Ruby watched. The phone was still ringing. Ruby answered. Her voice yelling across the PA. I got back to my desk and something was going wrong downstairs again. I heard Joe's voice in the corridor. He was yelling at Trevor.

F..... Hell I told you to make it 2cm. You're f... brain dead.

Nothing from Trevor.

Jesus Christ, this is going to cost me thousands.

He slammed the door open. Bang.

There would be so many arguments that occurred in the main office. Ruby would always be the instigator. The boys would be swearing and screaming at Ruby but she always screamed them down.

Then you would hear Ruby: A L I S O N

And, Alison would come running out of her office screaming along with Ruby and the said employee would be still screaming. Then Ruby would scream over the PA:

JOE. JOE. COME IMMEDIATELY TO THE FRONT OFFICE. URGENT. URGENT.

Joe would come running up the stairs and by the time he got there he was screaming and swearing, then when the employee finished he would kick the door on his way out, then slam it, and walk down the hallway swearing. Then he would come to the door between the offices and the factory - punch it or kick - and swear and scream once again.

Then I would be witness to such acting. They would both con Joe and insist that they were completely innocent and change the story. So of course Joe believed them because they were so good at lying. Then they would go on and on about it. Ruby's big loud voice, complaining over and over again. Then a payback would be underway. Then it would all start again when the employee found out what they had done. More screaming and swearing.

The factory wasn't any better. Such extremes. Either such fun and laughter, or Joe abusing someone, with Colleen walking out because she had had enough. We were so accustomed to it. It was just another day. We would all laugh about it and move on. Joe would be screaming at someone, telling them they were f... idiots, then ten minutes later the jokes would start again as if nothing had happened.

Then Joe would have the shits and scream over the Reception, slamming down the phone in my ear. I would sit there and he would scream:

HELLO. HELLO. JESUS CHRIST

And hang up. Smash, before I could get my hand on the ear piece.

When I first started it was all a total shock. I couldn't believe that it was allowed to happen. Joe frightened me - his loud voice screaming at me over the phone over nothing that made sense. Ruby whingeing all day, yet no one around seemed to notice. I remember one day I burst out crying because I couldn't understand this behaviour. Then as time goes on you don't worry about it - you get used to it - maybe even become loud yourself to survive.

I learnt not to take much notice of Joe. But Ruby got worse and worse as time went on. Then I would withdraw, trying to ignore it, but at night I could not sleep because at night all I heard was that voice in my head - day and night – not sleeping, tossing and turning. Then you begin to dread going to work because you know she would be screaming all day and nothing would be done about it. Hear that voice and you have to listen.

Then I began to get angry. She would talk and talk. I would say to myself. "Will you shut up?" Her whole body was overtaken with this voice. I would hear her going on and towards the end of her reign, I would sit at my desk and stretch my hand out as if I had a gun and get so much satisfaction in 'shooting her in the head' just to shut her up.

## the staff meet reception

Monday arrived. I had to start at 8.00am and Ruby had given me a key to open the front sliding door. I walked into the factory and into the Production room. I had to do this each morning because I had to pick up the costings. Sitting at her desk was the lady I had seen in the office downstairs when Ruby introduced me to the factory staff. She looked around at me. She had the same expression as the guys. She had straight red hair and would be about 40 years old. I smiled at her. She said, "Hi I'm Colleen". I said, "I'm Kathy. I work upstairs." "Yes I know." End of conversation.

I picked up the costings and walked out and down the corridor. I passed different staff members. They smiled and nodded at me. I smiled back. I remember thinking "They're not a very friendly lot." I got to the front door and unlocked it. Walked up the brass staircase and over to the Reception. I unlocked the door to the main office. No one was around. Walked in and put on the lights. Opened the second door beside the Reception. There were two doors together that went into the main office. Then opened the door into the tearoom. There were two staff members there. One a dark haired guy about 25 years old and another guy not too tall with sandy hair. "Hi I'm Mohammed. I guess you are Kathy." "Yes" Then the red haired guy said "Hi, I'm Derek." I could tell he was a character.

I turned around to go back to the Reception and started to do my costings. I heard the front door open and someone was walking up the stairs. A dark haired man appeared at the top of the stairs. He turned around and smiled at me. He walked up to the Reception. "Hi, I'm Craig." He had dark hair and a moustache. Quite good looking. Again, no expression, just polite. "Pleased to meet you." He shook my hand and then turned and walked down the corridor and I heard his keys open his office door. Time went by and I heard the doors open again. I heard a puff and sigh. I knew it was Ruby, what a struggle it was every day for her to climb those stairs. She reached the top of the stairs "Morning". No expression. She walked into the office and sat down at her desk and shuffled a few papers. Sigh. Sigh.

I looked at her and noticed that she was quite an ugly looking woman. She wore large clothes to obviously hide the rolls of fat. She has an overbite and bulging eyes and she never looked happy, as life seemed such a struggle and work seemed even more of a struggle. She said nothing to me. Then I heard the door open again and I heard someone just about running up the stairs - it was Alison.

"Morning." "Morning Alison." She went through the door to the main office and immediately Ruby got up and went into Alison's office. Whisper. Whisper. I answered the calls, paging employees, employees paging each other. I heard Colleen paging John. "John, come to production" Everything was so loud. Ruby was in Alison's office for a long time. She went back to her desk and started to answer the calls that were coming in. Her voice was so loud and so sharp. When she paged, her voice

would yell over the PA. The day went on and she helped me with anything I didn't understand. Then I heard Joe's voice yelling through the Reception intercom. "GET ME PETERSONS". Then he slammed down the phone. I looked over at Ruby. She quickly got the number and paged Joe over the PA. "Joe. Joe. Petersons on line 9". I looked at Ruby and she had no emotion. She just continued to do her work. As time went by, every now and then she would go into Alison's office and continue whispering. Why all this whispering? The days and weeks pass and I began to notice that this was not the usual conduct of an office environment. As the weeks went on I noticed that Joe screamed a lot over the PA to different employees and he also screamed over the Reception intercom to me, but Ruby then would take over and get him who he wanted. It had to be done very quickly. At different times the guys would come into the main office and such rudeness I have never seen from two women.

Ruby and Alison would send me down to the factory to get Joe to sign cheques for clients, some blank. By this time I was quite frightened of Joe because he was so loud and aggressive. He would sign the cheques and just walk off. No conversation, no emotion, no questions. He seemed so engrossed in his job. I got on quite well with Alison and Ruby but I began to realize in time that there was obviously friction between them and all the other staff. I thought 'Okay if I have to work here then I need to stay neutral and not get too friendly with other staff members, and not talk about any other staff member to Ruby and Alison'. They whispered so much and I would see them talking about so many of the other staff. Just mind my own business. On a few occasions Joe had called Ruby, 'Rubina'. I was in the tearoom one morning and as I walked out Ruby was coming out of Alison's office. I needed a pen. I said, "Rubina could I get a blue pen please".

She turned around and yelled at me.

Don't call me Rubina. Only my friends call me Rubina. My name is Ruby and don't you forget it.

I felt quite stunned and went back to the Reception.

On one occasion Alison asked me to go down to the factory and get Joe to sign a letter. There were employees everywhere around talking about jobs. I stood in line waiting for my turn but everyone jumped ahead of me. Eventually I asked Joe to sign the letter and he yelled at me, "I'm too busy" and he turned and walked away. I went upstairs and went into Alison's office and started to cry. "He keeps yelling at me Alison". Alison paged him to contact her. "Yes love." "Joe, Kathy is in my office crying. You don't realise but you frighten these girls when you yell." "Okay love, I'm coming up."

A few minutes later he appeared at the door. He smiled at me. "I'm sorry love, I don't mean to yell. Are you okay?" I said, "yes, I'm okay". He patted me on the back and said, "Sorry love. I'll try not to yell at you" and he walked out.

The weeks passed and I realised that this conduct was the norm. I started to see such anger and aggression in Ruby. Ruby would do the guys' pay and they would come up at times to check their hours. Ian came up to the main office and walked up to Ruby's desk.

Could I check on my hours for overtime?

It's right Ian. Sigh

I think I'm owed half an hour.

Jesus Christ, this shits me.

Ruby got up from her chair and grabbed the clock card with a snarl on her face. Her voice began to get so loud and nasty and she began to explain that he was wrong. She looked straight through him. She was right.

I told you were wrong.

Ian got so angry he walked out and slammed the Reception door.

Then Alison came out of her office

What did he want?

Ruby stared up at Alison

Men should be put down at birth. None of them have any brains.

Alison said:

They think they know the lot Ruby.

The day continued. I noticed that Ruby was getting so loud and as time went by there were so many arguments between her and the other staff members, but there didn't seem to be a logical reason for the arguments. They were all about nothing.

I noticed that Ruby slammed the phone down a lot and also swore. When she got too aggressive Alison would tell her to control herself and stop yelling.

One day Mick came up to check his pay.

He walked into the main office. Ruby looked at him

What do you want Mick?

I need to check my pay.

There's nothing wrong with it.

Stop bloody yelling at me.

I'm not yelling. What do you want?

Ruby looked at him.

I worked last Saturday. I'm missing two hours.

By this time Ruby is ready to attack Mick. She managed to get herself up from her chair and grabbed the timecard and checked it.

There's nothing wrong, Mick. I paid you the correct amount.

She walked away not explaining anything.

Mick looked at her and had to get out of the office. And, she just stared at him all the time as he left and started yelling out to Alison. Mick slammed the door on his way out.

Ruby and Alison started discussing what happened and Ruby went over her usual pattern of words and sighs and sayings. Ten minutes later Joe yelled over Ruby's intercom.

Ruby, check Mick's pay. He says you didn't pay him two hours.

He's wrong Joe, but I'll check again.

Her voice is loud. Joe slammed the phone down. She got up.

Jesus I'm sick of this.

Alison and Ruby began checking the clock card. Then they noticed that they had actually overpaid him. Well this made her very happy. Alison said:

Get him to come up here. I can't wait to see Mick's face when he finds out.

So they paged Joe to come to the office.

JOE, WOULD YOU COME TO THE MAIN OFFICE?

Joe came up and they explained the mistake to him.

“We’ll deduct it from Mick’s next pay”, says Alison

“Okay love”, says Joe. “I’ll get Mick to come up to see you”.

He walked out. Ruby and Alison were having a good laugh. Alison went back to her office. Then Mick walked in and Ruby was standing there ready, with her hands on her hips, and a smirk on her face.

She said:

Yes, you were right Mick. I did make a mistake.

This time she went to the trouble of explaining it.

I’ll deduct it from your next pay.

Mick was angry.

You think you’re so bloody smart don’t you?

A L I S O N. A L I S O N. Ruby screamed.

Alison came running out of her office.

You had better stop swearing Mick. We’ll fix the mistake.

You’re nothing but a f..... bitch.

He yelled. He slammed the door, walked out and looked at me.

I’ll kill that bitch one day.

He walked down the hall, kicked the door, then slammed it behind him. Of course, all hell broke loose downstairs. Ruby and Alison continued discussing it over and over.

I was at my desk thinking: “Okay stay out of it and make no comment.” And I didn’t.

I was starting to get a picture of what was going on. I knew I would be all right if I completely stayed out of it and I would never make any comment to either Alison or Ruby and any other employee about what was going on. Just do my work and mind my own business.

As time went by I began to see that the whispering and bitching about all the other staff was on a daily basis. Ruby would go over the same pattern of things she did. She would sigh a lot. 'Jesus-Christ' was her favourite word. 'I am surrounded by fools.' Then the head would shake. She loved the saying, 'Men should be put down at birth. They're nothing but a bunch of arseholes, bloody idiots.' She would get very loud and slam phones down and the voice went on and on all day. When she would get out of control, Alison would pull her up and tell her to quieten down.

The office was mainly run manually except for the invoices, which were done by Ruby on computer. They used account books. Wrote out cheques manually, did the pays manually on cards, and had the wages brought in by Security guards each week.

Eventually Ruby taught me 'the green books' as they were called. You had to put into different columns 'Petrol', 'Rates', 'Stationery' etc. So I began to take them over and when Ruby had time she would do them too. Then at the end of each month Ruby and Alison would balance them.

I got on okay with the both of them because I decided that I would not repeat anything to them when I would hear the rest of the employees talking about them and it was most of the time.

Joe would yell a lot over the PA. But when something went wrong down stairs all hell broke loose. Joe would start screaming at me over the switch.

Get me Lawson and Co.

Smash. I would quickly get them and page. He would answer immediately but when he hung up sometimes it would be off the hook. All you would hear is "F... Hell! I'm F.... sick of this. Then Alison would intercom downstairs. "Joe. Hang up, hang up." Then smash.

The sad thing was I was beginning to get used to this behaviour, just as the rest of the staff did. And you couldn't help but like Joe. He had such a great laugh you could hear it everywhere. He loved a joke and a funny story. When he came into the office and told us a funny story Ruby would laugh so much. "Oh Joe you're so funny", but everybody else was an idiot.

Cameron was a single father and he would come up into the office, say 'hello' to me as he walked past the Reception and walk up to Ruby's desk.

Would I be able to borrow twenty dollars till next week?

She said nothing. She wouldn't even give him the courtesy of looking at him as she took the tin out of the filing cabinet. And, still saying nothing, she took out twenty dollars and put it on the desk.

“Sign here”, she said. Not looking up at him.

Cameron signed.

Thank you Ruby.

Ruby replied:

Hmph.

Cameron walked out. As he passed my desk he looked at me and said:

Bitch.

Then Ruby started:

Can't he manage his money? Always coming up here to borrow money.

Her head shook from side to side. Then she gave a big sigh. She continued her usual behaviour, answering calls, slamming phones down, and commenting about the fools that surrounded her.

The next week comes and she is ready. Cameron walked in. She looked up at him. She yelled, “Haven't got any money in petty cash” and began to shake her head from side to side and not look at him. He stood there not knowing what to do or say.

I said NO Cameron.

So Cameron would walk out and back down to the factory.

This happened time and time again.

Derek. What a character. Very arty. Alison and Ruby hated him. He hated them back.

Derek would be about 5'8". Long hair. Short hair. Coloured hair. Anything goes. Such fun. He would tell stories. I got to know him so well. All these people I mention... I didn't get to know them till I came back to work when those two had left.

I was at the Reception desk. Alison loved to hold back Derek's cheques just to get to him as he was a Contractor. She would come up with any excuse not to give him his money. If Joe checked with her she would just tell him:

Where can I get the money from. There's not enough for the wages, let alone for him?

Anyway he came up to me at the Desk.

Kath, do you know anything about my cheque?

No Derek, I don't have control over the cheques.

Alison won't hand it over to me.

We both talk very softly so they can't hear us.

Will you try to find out about it?

Yeah, I'll try Derek.

Thanks love.

I gave it some time and I approached Alison in her office.

Alison, Derek wants to know if his cheque is ready.

She looked up at me, no expression.

No.

So that's it. I walked out.

Derek approached me later.

Did you find out anything?

No. Derek, she is not going to hand it over yet.

He was angry.

Those bitches, I've had enough of them.

And he walked away.

Next morning John came up to my Desk to have a yak. He was the Salesman. Very funny man. Black humour. He gets on well with Alison and Ruby. He was only at work for a couple of hours then gets out as soon as he can.

You should have been here last night - all hell broke loose.

What now?

Derek complained to Joe that Alison was holding his cheques and not paying him. So Joe came upstairs with Derek to front Alison. They were going hammer and tongs at each other. The four of them were screaming. Alison said that she had no money to pay him and Derek yelled that she only does it. Then Ruby said:

Are you calling Alison a liar?

Derek said:

Yes. Yes, she is a liar.

What can I say John?

Anyway we have a chat and a couple of laughs.

Michael. A typical English Gentleman. Quiet. My God did they give him a terrible time? Especially Ruby. He was a rep - about sixty years old.

He came into the main office.

Ruby could you arrange some cash for me? I'm going to NZ next week.

She looked up.

How much?

About two hundred dollars.

I'll do it when I get time.

She put her head down.

Thanks, honey.

She looked up, staring through him and yelled at him.

DON'T YOU EVER CALL ME HONEY AGAIN. MY NAME IS RUBY.

She was staring at him. He walked out of the office. Such a gentleman. No expression, no swearing. Of course, she continued.

I felt so sorry for him. Of course Ruby continued all day – sighing, yelling, swearing and watching me.

Another day Ruby was checking the Amex. Of course she went through every one, step by step, dying to find something.

ALISON.

Yeah.

YOU GOT A MINUTE?

Alison came running out of her office knowing that Ruby was onto something.

What's up?

Bloody Michael has gone and put a cigar onto the Amex. Who does he think he is? He sure has a great time on Ltdown.

I'll see Joe. He is going to pay that back.

Sure enough, he is approached by Joe and he has to pay it back.

About twelve months before they left, Alison was bustling about the Office. She went to the filing cabinet. I knew something was going on. She started shuffling invoices very quickly. Ruby was sitting at her desk not looking and head down. Not a word.

Next morning Craig came up to talk to me.

Alison nearly got caught out.

What do you mean?

She bought a computer on Lodown's account and the guy rang Hans asking for the cheques, so Hans approached Alison and she told him that she had sent the cheque last week.

Oh yeah.

It really didn't interest me because quite honestly I didn't understand. Anyway a couple of days later he came up to me.

You know the cheques that Alison was supposed to have sent?

Yeah.

Well they turned up yesterday and with the day before date on it.

I still didn't click, because I had no idea what Alison was up to, but Hans was onto her. Nothing more was said.

Mohammed was about 28 years old, and Muslim. He had had a number of arguments with them and the language came out of him because he became so frustrated with them and their games. Anyway he usually left about 3.30p.m. Sometimes he would work late. His mother always wanted to know where he was. Sometimes she would ring after he was gone, and she had trouble speaking English. On this night the phone rang and Ruby answered.

No, he's gone home.

And she hung up the phone in her ear. She yelled out to Alison.

I'M SICK OF THAT TOWEL HEAD RINGING WHEN MOHAMMED IS GONE.

One day I came back from the bank and Ruby was going off her face. There had been a screaming match between Mohammed and Alison and Ruby. Apparently Mohammed came in, yelling at them because Ruby had hung up on one of his mates.

And, when approached by Mohammed, Ruby said that he was rude to her. So time went by and we were having lunch and she answered the phone.

Yes. Yes.

She hung up. She stared at me, her eyes bulging.

Tell Mohammed that some “DAGO” called him.

I said nothing. The day continued. Bitching with Alison. Waiting for any sign of attack from some other employee. The voice continued all day long. Phones slamming.

I knew it didn't bother Alison as she had her own office and it dulled the noise. But she seemed to want Ruby to be out of control.

Lucy started about two to three years after me, on a part-time basis. She would come into work for two to three days. Lucy was a very quiet lady, not a nasty bone in her body, but I found over this time she was probably too nice and now is still being trampled on. I found over time that I could not depend on her for any sort of backing, but then as you read you will understand why. She is my age, with mousy blonde hair and pointed features. Just a lovely lady, quiet spoken ... and not at all interested in trouble.

Phillip was the foreman for the factory. He was a large man and had a beard and jet black thick hair. He always reminded me of a lion. Good sense of humour and very likeable. He had a temper at times too, and a very loud voice. He was just sent crazy by these women to the point of kicking and punching doors. They loved every bit of it.

**Ruby hated it when one of the guys came up on Thursday afternoon or Friday to question their pay. They would walk in and she would stare at them.**

Could I check on my hours for overtime?

It's right, Cameron.

I think I'm owed half an hour.

Jesus Christ this shits me.

Ruby gets up from her chair and grabs the clock card, still with a snarl on her face. When she is right her voice gets loud and nasty, and as she explains she looks right through the person who had dared to question her.

“I told you, you were wrong”, she says.

And, she went back to her desk and whined and swore in a low voice. Cameron walked out. Alison came out of her office.

What did he want?

Ruby stared up at Alison.

Men should be put down at birth. None of them have any brains.

Alison says:

They think they know the lot Ruby.

Mick had a terrible temper when it came to Alison and Ruby. He had shocking fights with them. I remember the following occasion very well. Mick was about thirty-two years old, stocky with dark hair.

Mick walked in.

What do you want Mick?

I need to check my pay.

There's nothing wrong with it.

Stop bloody yelling at me.

I'm not yelling. *What do you want?*

Ruby looked at him with a snarl.

I worked last Saturday. I'm missing two hours.

By this time Ruby was ready to attack and so was Mick. She managed to get herself up from her chair and grabbed the timecard and checked it.

There's nothing wrong, Mick. I paid you the correct amount.

She walked away not explaining anything.

Mick looked at her and had to get out of the office. And she just stared at him all the time as he left and started yelling out to Alison. Mick slammed the door on his way out.

Ruby and Alison started discussing what happened and Ruby went over her usual pattern of words and sighs and sayings. Ten minutes later Joe yelled over Ruby's intercom.

Ruby check Mick's pay. He says you didn't pay him two hours.

He's wrong Joe, but I'll check again.

Joe slammed the phone down. She got up.

Jesus I'm sick of this.

Alison and Ruby began checking the clock card. Then they noticed that they had actually overpaid him. Well this made her very happy. Alison said:

Get him to come up here. I can't wait to see Mick's face when he finds out.

So they paged Joe to come to the office.

JOE WOULD YOU COME TO THE MAIN OFFICE?

Joe came up and they explained the mistake to him.

"We'll deduct it from Mick's next pay", says Alison.

"Okay love", says Joe. "I'll get Mick to come up to see you."

He walked out. Ruby and Alison were having a good laugh. Then Mick walked in and Ruby was standing there with her hands on her hips and a smirk on her face. She said:

Yes you were right Mick I did make a mistake.

This time she went to the trouble of explaining it.

I'll deduct it from your next pay.

Mick was angry.

You think you're so bloody smart don't you?

"ALISON. ALISON", Ruby screamed.

Alison came running out of her office.

You had better stop swearing Mick. We'll fix the mistake.

You're nothing but a f..... bitch.

He yelled. He slammed the door, walked out and looked at me.

**I'll kill that bitch one day.**

He walked down the hall, kicked the door, then slammed it behind him. Of course all hell broke loose downstairs. Ruby and Alison were discussing it over and over.

Ruby always screamed over the P.A. Colleen worked downstairs. She couldn't stand Colleen. This was said over and over through the years.

Colleen called over the P.A.

Cameron, would you come to production?

Ruby looked up to the roof and quietly said with a sigh:

Does she have to scream over the P.A? There's no need for it.

Then her head shook from side to side. I just thought:

You're an idiot.

Stacey worked for Avon. She would drop a book off at the Reception and have a talk with me. I didn't want to talk to her because I knew it annoyed Ruby. One Thursday Stacey arrived. She was there a couple of minutes and Alison opened the door and got a drink of water. She turned to Stacey, "Please leave the Reception area. It is off limits on Thursdays." The voice was so dominant. Stacey looked at me and walked out. I knew that Ruby had seen us talking and told Alison. That's why Alison came out.

## harassment

**Ruby began to harass me about three years after I started. At first I had enough sense to take a back seat with the other staff because from day one I picked up on the division between Ruby and Alison and other staff. I knew if I had to survive there I had to stay neutral and not get too chummy with anyone. That really didn't worry me too much as I take a long time to trust people anyway and I never craved friendship. I like people to prove themselves.**

There were always things being said downstairs to me about them, but I made no comment. I could see and hear what went on in the office, and what was said, but no one was told through me. As time went on, different staff members wanted to talk to me as I would have to go down to the factory and they enjoyed a chat and a laugh.

**So they would come up to the Reception and talk to me. Ruby began to notice this and didn't like it. Then Colleen and the guys would ring the Reception and have a laugh about some things. She hated it, so from that time she did everything possible to try to stop it. She became obsessed with me.**

I couldn't move - I couldn't do anything. I tried to hide things, but I wasn't able. And she could see it. She would come down heavier, and it was eating away at her through jealousy and anger.

**She began to watch me all the time. I would go to the toilet and I could tell by the time I got back that she was angry. She couldn't handle me being out of her sight.**

She would know if I took too long that I might have talked to someone. She began to start a pattern again. One day I went to the toilet and came out as she reached the door. She screamed at me. "What took you so long? I've been waiting to go." Then if she hadn't followed me, she would be waiting at the edge of her seat staring at the door for me to open it and screaming, "I've been hanging on to go." The funny thing was I would not stop to talk at all because in the end I tried to get there and back as quickly as I could. Once the pattern started with her it continued, so it would go on over and over again.

## things that didn't add up

Ruby loved drama. Her daughter worked for the disabled. One night on the news we heard that a few men were burnt at the place where her daughter worked but her daughter was interstate at the time.

The next morning Lucy and I were in the office talking. All of a sudden the door flew open and Ruby must have run up those stairs so quickly. At the top of her voice she screamed and was trying to hold back the tears. "THEY WERE LISA'S BOYS. THEY WE'RE LISA'S BOY'S" She ran to her desk her hands on her face crying and kept repeating "They were Lisa's boys". When she settled down she rang Lisa, who was still away.

Hi Lisa how are you? Lisa you have to cry you're not crying. You must cry.

I'm not yelling Lisa.

And her daughter hung up. She looked at me.

She's in denial she's in denial.

Of course the drama continued. In the end Lisa was on antidepressants and seeing a specialist. I wonder why?

Lucy and Ruby and I were at lunch. My fridge had stopped working and I was telling them about it.

I have to get someone in to check my fridge.

What's wrong with it? Said Lucy.

It just stopped working. I switched it off to get the ice off and when I switched it back again, it hasn't worked since.

Ruby looked at me.

When did you get it?

About ten years ago.

What kind is it? She said

A Westinghouse. I said

Then she looked at me, her eyes popping.

There can't be anything wrong with it. It's the same make as mine and mine is okay. So yours is too.

She's yelled at me. I looked at her not believing what she said. Later Lucy said to me.

What on earth was she talking about at lunchtime? How did she figure out that her fridge is okay so yours should be?

Lucy she's a nut case.

We both laughed.

My health continued to get worse and I was beginning to make mistakes on the codes for the costings. I would do the green books every day but for the past weeks Alison told me not to worry about them I was making mistakes on them so I thought it must have been that reason. I was concerned because they were a few weeks behind and no one else had touched them.

Ruby began to start to follow me down to the toilet a few minutes after I had left. One day I came out and as I opened the door she was standing there.

What took you so long?.

I told her to shut up.

She yelled back at me.

Don't tell me to shut up or I'll knock you out.

No one would ever be able to put her in her place. She would just scream at them and she would shout them down and she knew she had Alison behind her.

On a couple of occasions I went to the toilet and when I came back she would be on the edge of her seat.

I've been dying to go.

And she would jump up and slam the door.

She would sit watching me all the time if someone was at the Reception talking to me then she would get up open the door to Reception, go to the toilet and come back and as she went through to the office she would slam the door to the extent that the pictures would all move on the walls.

They were both setting employees up everywhere. Complaints were put into Joe but nothing was ever said to them. Ruby would spend hours and hours checking Amexes to try to get something on the guys and then run to Joe and tell him.

And, Alison and Ruby would also spend hours typing out poems together. Such beautiful poems about love, happiness, this beautiful world. Such beauty they could see in these poems.

Just out of the blue one day Alison turned up with a beautiful white Mercedes Benz. It was her crowning glory. You should have seen Han's face.

Every morning when Alison would arrive she would turn her computer on straight away. On a number of occasions she would yell out to Ruby.

Someone's been in my computer again Ruby.

I knew it would have been Han's and so did she.

I became paranoid about making mistakes as Ruby would make such a fuss of it. I dreaded the phone ringing with a wrong code but my concentration was beginning to fail.

She would yell out for everyone to hear.

Another bloody wrong code.

I could tell that Hans was getting frustrated with their conduct too and I knew that he thought that I was part of all the bitching because I never made any comment about them.

Alison walked up the stairs.

Ruby won't be in for a couple of days.

Why?

Lisa had to have her appendix out.

I thought to myself. 'That was sudden'.

A few days later Ruby came in. Of course we heard all about it.

Poor Lisa she had terrible pains. Lisa is a big girl too. I took her to the hospital and they didn't want to do anything. I told them they better take her appendix out. They weren't going to tell me what to do. I wasn't moving till they did it.

Anyway time wore on through the day. She started talking to me about it and then said.

Funny just as she was going through to the theatre, Lisa said to me "Mum the pain has gone" I didn't take much notice of it, then later she tells me that they both were given a cake with chocolates in it and they both ate it all it was so nice.

I thought to myself, 'That's why the pain but I completely understand why the Doctor's took the appendix out.'

**Ruby loved the Petty Cash. As far as she is concerned she owned it. Both Alison and Ruby had tins. Alison even dabbled in the petty cash as we found out.**

Friday, no Alison.

By this time they both hated Hans with a passion. Ruby was out of control. Swearing and screaming, whingeing etc. Hans walked into the main office from the tearoom. He turned to Ruby and said:

Ruby if you don't like the job then leave.

Oh boy did she like that comment. She stood right in front of him with her hands on her hips and stared at him.

SACK ME. GO ON SACK ME.

He was a gentle man and looked at her, making no comment and walked out. Then she picked up the phone and rang Alison. Alison answered Ruby.

I told Hans what for the arsehole.

I just answered the calls, I didn't want to listen. The sad thing was I'm so used to it. It was just another day.

I began to feel like Han's was coming down on me. It really annoyed me because they were allowed to do and treat people the way they wanted and nothing was said.

I answered a call from Hans. He had a go at me but I didn't know what he was talking about so I hung up the phone in his ear. I had just about had enough.

Next morning he came up to the Reception and asked me to come into his office. I sat down knowing what it was about. He looked at me and said, "I am your superior and do not ever hang up on me again." I looked at him and said:

I have nothing to do with what you were having a go at me for.

Then I began to get upset.

Hans I am not involved with those two women and I don't want to get involved. I have been off on stress and am on tablets and I can't take much more.

He looked at me and apologised for being wrong. I still remember the words he said.

I am trying to do something about the situation. I can only hope that good will overcome evil.

I got up and opened the door. Alison had just walked up the stairs. She turned around and looked at me. I knew I would be in big trouble.

A few minutes later Hans paged Joe to come to his office. Joe arrived and shut the door. Then I heard him yell at the top of his voice.

**NO, NOT UNDER ANY CONDITION.**

I knew it was to do with me, and I knew Hans wanted Ruby gone.

Things went from bad to worse over the next few weeks. Ruby's yelling and screaming would go non-stop. She was totally out of control. I approached Hans one day and asked him if he could somehow arrange for the door between the Reception and the office to be shut because I couldn't take anymore. He told me he would look into it.

It didn't happen.

**12.30pm. Alison usually ate in her office. Ruby always answered the phone and Lucy and I had lunch at Ruby's desk. Try to remember the power these two women had and you might understand why we all had to tow the line. Life is hard enough.**

Someone in the factory rang me at the Reception.

Hello. Hello. Kathy are you there?

Then I heard this almighty scream - more like a loud shriek.

FOURTEEN. FOURTEEN.

That was her ext. no

Hello. Hello. Kathy?

FOURTEEN. FOURTEEN. Bloody dickheads they know it's lunchtime.

Her voice travelled through my ear. Lucy and I managed to give each other a quick look. The phone rang again. She answered:

He's at lunch. No you can't talk to him ring back at 1.00.

She put the phone down.

I'm surrounded by fools.

Lunch ended. She sighed and sighed. And, yelled for the rest of the afternoon.

Ruby had gone to Queensland for two weeks.

Alison, Lucy and myself were at work. Lucy was doing Ruby's work without any problems. Two weeks went by and once again we all dreaded her coming back.

It was 8.00am and I was at Reception. It was the only time I got a chance to talk to the guys that worked around me.

How are you Craig?

Yeah, not bad.

Guess what? I've got some good news for you.

What's that?"

Ruby's back.

He rolled his eyes.

Gee thanks for making my day.

I laughed.

Sure enough right on cue she arrived. I was watching because I knew that Lucy had done all her work. I knew from previous years that when Lucy didn't work she would walk in and go to her desk and say.

Jesus Christ can't I go on leave without coming back and all my work is here to do?

Then her head would shake from side to side. She would start slamming things down on her desk. I was getting such satisfaction on this morning.

She walked to her desk and started looking for something to bitch about. There were only about four invoices to file.

How was your holiday Ruby?

It was okay but I had to come back to this place.

Lucy walked in.

Hi Ruby, how did your holiday go?

She looked up at Lucy.

Huh? Okay.

Alison arrived.

Morning Ruby.

Oh. Hi Alison.

Then once again on cue she followed Alison into her office. There was so much bitching to catch up on. So they talked and whispered on and on. Ruby walked out of Alison's office mumbling something. Sigh. Sigh. Sigh. Lucy sat quietly doing invoices. I decided to get a cuppa. I dared not talk to anyone in the tearoom just a polite, "How are you today?"

I came out and Ruby started picking up the invoices and throwing them onto her desk.

Can't I go away on holidays without work being left on my desk? This shits me.

I couldn't help myself.

Ruby, Lucy did all your work while you were away.

Lucy sat still, her eyes glued to the computer screen, not wanting to look up. Ruby stared at me and said nothing. I went to my desk knowing that there would be a payback for my comment. I didn't care. It felt good. The day continued and ended. She had the shits all day.

Ruby knew that Lucy felt the cold a lot. Over several weeks I began to see a pattern forming. On the days that Lucy was in Ruby turned the air conditioner down to just about freezing.

It didn't worry me as I was out in the foyer. It also didn't worry Ruby as she was so large. Lucy started to wear jumpers to work and it was Summer. Lucy walked out to go to the toilet. She knew she was not allowed to talk to me but quickly let me feel her hands.

They were so cold. Of course, by then I realized that Lucy was being paid back for doing Ruby's job so well. Once again I walked into the office and commented on how it was strange that the air conditioner was always cold when Lucy is in. The evil eyes glared at me. She was fuming.

Ruby would watch me all the time. Then if someone was at the Reception she would get up and go into Alison's office. One day I was talking to the Avon lady and Ruby spotted me. She got up from her chair. Next thing Alison opened the door. She said to her

Please leave the building, this area is restricted on Thursdays.

The lady looked at me and left.

They both were heartless. Lucy's husband hadn't been well and he had to get some tests done for his heart. Lucy received a call from her husband and when she hung up she started to cry. I was in the main office at the time. Lucy got up and walked out and I followed her. She told me that her husband had a mild heart attack. I gave her a hug and then she went to the toilet. When I went back to the office Alison called me in to her office. "What's wrong with her?" "She just found out that Billy had a mild heart attack. She looked up at me and said. "Tell her to go home and don't be carrying on crying in here. We all have our problems but you don't see me coming in and crying. I walked out.

The Accountants were coming out to Lowdown to discuss the changeover to computers with Joe and Hans. Alison seemed really agitated all morning. They were in the Boardroom. Alison would keep coming out to me and say: "Can you hear anything from the Boardroom?" Then she would go into her office to talk to Ruby. Whisper. Whisper. Then out to me again. "Go down the hallway and listen" "I can't hear anything Alison". She walked away. She was so uneasy.

After some time Hans managed to get a new system going just for the monthly figures. The books didn't change and the cheques were still written out manually along with the pays.

I remember a lady came in to teach Ruby and Alison the system. They sat behind her making smart comments at the end of the day she walked out crying. They both had terrible arguments with the guys in IT when they were installing the computers but eventually Hans succeeded.

They were both acting so strange all the time. The screaming and the arguments kept going along with Joe's angry outbursts. I would have to go downstairs on a regular basis to get things signed. Ruby started following me down by the intercom. She would buzz the intercom down in production and there would be silence. She was trying to hear if I was having any sort of conversation with Colleen or anyone else in the office. Colleen would look at me and point to the intercom. She would do the same thing when I would be in Craig's office. Of course like everything she did it was over the top.

One day I fronted Alison in her office and Ruby was there. I said to Alison, "It seems to bother Ruby when I go downstairs." I looked at Ruby. "If it bothers you so much Ruby then stop sending me and do it yourself. I knew Alison was involved behind this behaviour too. Alison just looked at me. "NO." I gave them both a look and walked out. All this behaviour was beginning to make me worse. But I knew that I wasn't the only one suffering because one day I went down to dispatch and Jenny and Colleen were crying and talking about the both of them.

Once the system got going Hans would ask for the figures on a regular basis. It made Alison very agitated.

Trevor was Han's Foreman and would converse a lot with Hans. Alison refused to have anything to do with any of the other men yet he would go to family turns. Even Ruby in the 12 years they worked together had never been in her house before. Trevor would be in Alison's office all the time talking to her.

During this time I was walking into the Program room and overhead someone talking about cameras being installed. That same day Alison came over to me at Reception and said, "I have something to tell you." I looked up at her. "What?" "I have just been told that Hans has installed cameras in the office. "He is out to get us and out to get you too." I couldn't believe it. How could they do such an underhanded thing? It upset me for days.

Both Ruby and Alison were acting stranger and stranger. They seemed completely out of reality with things they were saying.

There was an occasion when the Office had been broken into. They had taken some petty cash and a couple of pay packets. Joe suspected a certain employee. But Alison had herself convinced that it was business espionage and she would shuffle through files trying to find some evidence. I remember Ruby would walk out of Alison's office rolling her eyes, but of course she had no option but to agree.

They both complained to Hans that the guys were coming and going and he needed to get a sign-in book going, which he did. You have no idea what trouble this stupid book caused. They would check and re check this book who signed in and who signed out. Then complain all the time if someone didn't sign it.

I remember Tony from Programming came up to the Reception and looked at me. Last night I dreamt about this diary and Ruby said something to me about it and I smashed it in her face. He looked at me "How sad is that?"

Allen Symonds was the foreman and every Thursday morning he would come up to the main office at 9.00am to give Ruby the guys times for their pay. If he was not there by 9.10 it started.

ALLEN SYMONDS. COME TO THE MAIN OFFICE. ALLEN SYMONDS. COME TO THE MAIN OFFICE.

What the hell is he doing?

Ruby loved this day because it gave her so much power.

Where the bloody hell is he? Jesus Christ.

Then Allen appeared at the doorway. Ruby said:

I need those times if you want those idiots down there to be paid.

Allen had had enough.

Why don't you just shut up? I have things to do too, Ruby.

That's not my problem. You better make sure this doesn't happen next week.

Allen was angry.

You're nothing but a f... bitch.

And he walked out, slamming the door behind him. I thought, 'Here we go again.'

Ruby went running into Alison's office. Alison looked at Ruby.

What was that all about?

That bloody idiot just swore at me.

Alison looked at her.

Don't worry I'll fix him.

She grabbed the phone and rang Joe.

Joe I need to talk to you.

By this time Joe knew all about it. Alison said,

We don't have to put up with that sort of language.

Ruby stood in Alison's office once again with her hands on her hips. Just loving it. Alison put the phone down and said to Ruby:

Joe's coming up.

Time passed and she didn't stop complaining.

I don't give a shit if they get paid or not.

I could hear Joe walking up the hallway. He went inside the office and the pattern started again. Joe said:

What the hells going on?

And Ruby replied:

He comes up here causing trouble.

And Alison said:

Ruby just needs the times...

It went on and on.

In the afternoon Alison called me into the office.

Kathy, I want you to put the guys times into the computer in the mornings. Ruby will show you how.

Okay, sure.

**So a few Thursdays go by and there was no trouble. Then one Thursday I was with Allen. We were behind in time because he came up a bit late and I had been away the previous two days, so I had extra to put in. Then Ruby arrived and she had us right where she wanted us. She had been waiting for this for weeks.**

She no sooner hit the doorway and we both turned around. She had started screaming.

This is supposed to be done by the time I walk into this office.

She started yelling at Allen:

Why isn't it done?

Alison hadn't arrived yet. There was screaming going on between Ruby and Mark.

Ruby it wasn't Mark's fault. I was behind.

Ruby:

Then in future you make sure it is done by the time I get in.

Mark made his usual exit, slamming the door. I finished off and Alison arrived.

Ruby started again. She followed Alison into the office. Whisper, whisper. I knew they were talking about me. I realised that Ruby was not happy about the job being taken from her.

It was just another day at Lodown but she had the day that she had been waiting for.

## secrets and surveillance

**Things started to go strange about three years before I went off. Alison ran the office manually. Everything was written in books. Invoices done manually, accounting books, pays put in manually, cash was delivered for paydays, cheques written. Hans wanted to change the system. (The Sydney office was run by computer.) The only thing done by computer was the invoicing. It was a tug of war between Alison and Hans. Alison was totally opposed to it. She refused to change. There were meetings in the Boardroom between Alison, Hans, and Joe. Alison would have Joe in her Office with the door shut.**

I didn't know what was going on. Ruby told me Alison didn't want to change. Hans would come in on a number of occasions and each time there would be an argument. She refused. Finally Hans managed to install computers in the office. One for Alison, Ruby, and myself. All Alison used it for was solitaire. Hans contracted people to start a new system, which happened over quite a few months. Every meeting they had with other staff Ruby and Alison would take over, mouthing off, and opposing it. Hans had a lady come in to teach them the computer system - they sat behind her not interested, making smart remarks.

The lady left crying and said she would not come back. There was so much underlying tension. Ruby and Alison began to hate Hans. Alison would come up to me and say, "Hans wants our jobs gone and that includes you Kathy." I make no comment. She was acting so strange, so erratic at times. Not making sense. Ruby completely out of control. So much whispering and door shutting.

Cameras were installed without us knowing. What a shock that was. I remember Hans had the accountants out and there was a meeting in the Boardroom. Alison still wanted them done manually, the old fashion way. The accountants were Little and White. Alison had spoken to Henry from there a number of times before the meeting. This day I was at my desk and fed up with Alison's weird behaviour. She came up to me and said almost in a desperate voice, "Can you hear anything? Can you hear anything from the Boardroom?" "No, just voices." Then she would go into her office, talk to Ruby. Whisper. Whisper. Then out again to me. "Go down the hallway and listen." "I can't hear anything Alison." She walked away. She was so uneasy. After a time Hans managed to get a new system going just for the job cards and invoices. The books didn't change or the cheques. Hans managed to get Alison to do the monthly figures and what ever goes with that. Alison would always come in of morning and immediately check her computer. "My computer has been tampered with again Ruby."

Trevor was Hans' Foreman and would converse a lot with Hans. I never trusted Trevor and neither did the other staff. He was a nice enough type of guy, but like Alison, a liar. Alison refused to have anything to do with any other staff except Ray, and strangely enough, she began to buddy up with Trevor. Birds of a feather. It is obvious to me now that Alison used him for information.

He would go to family turns, which was completely out of character. He told her about the cameras. There was so much whispering going on everywhere. When Alison turned up with the Mercedes things got even more tense. It was a total game of cat and mouse. When Mick and Joshua would be in the office trying to put a system in on the computers, Ruby and Alison would have screaming arguments with the guys in an effort to block this happening. Joe would always back the two of them.

One lunchtime they both came out and signed the book, looked at me and said as they were signing, "We are going to the solicitors," and wrote it in the book. 'Gone to Solicitors.' The next week they would check the mail looking for a letter. Then a letter came addressed to Hans. I knew this was the one they were waiting on. Alison came up in the afternoon. "Have you given the mail to Hans yet?" "No." She knew he was in his office "Go and give it to him," which I did. She went to her office. I heard Hans tear something up. Alison came back to me and said, "Has Hans said anything to you about the mail?" "No." "Hngh," and she walked away and that was that. I knew that they had sent Hans a Solicitor's letter to cover themselves some how.

## the crow's nest

It was the last time I had to ever see Ruby again, but I didn't know at the time. Only one more glimpse of her after that day left to face. I came into work as usual, totally exhausted. Ruby came in and the usual yelling etc began. Alison was in her office and I was in the tearoom. The phone rang and Ruby answered. Then just what she wanted, happened. I heard, "Jesus Christ" and the filing cabinet draw smashed. She'd found a wrong invoice code.

I threw down my cup and said, "I've had enough." I went down to Craig's office. He asked me to calm down. His door was open. I didn't have to explain to anyone, they all just understood.

Alison walked down the hallway to the toilet. I went inside to the toilet. I fronted her and said, "Alison, you have to do something about her." She looked at me. . . . "You have been making a lot of mistakes lately and talking to the guys in the morning." I said, "Why don't you put your energy into controlling Ruby?" She said, "You haven't been doing the green books." I told her to get Ruby to do them. She said Ruby has been helping her do work." I looked at her and said, "Yeah, help you write out your poems for two and a half hours in the mornings." She looked at me and said that we would discuss this in the boardroom. I told her, "Don't worry, I'll see Joe," and walked out. (What a fool I was at the time to think that he would listen to me.)

I went downstairs and he was on the telephone, Colleen was at her desk. She helped me immediately. Joe kept talking. He put down the telephone. I said, "Joe you have to do something about those women." He looked at me and said, "I'll talk to you soon." He had more important things to do. There were jobs to get out.

I went into the next room. Helen was there and Colleen. I was deteriorating very quickly. Colleen said, "So many more important things to do aren't there?" I desperately needed her and asked her not to leave me. She put her arms around me. I don't think I have ever needed anyone so much.

In such a short time, I could feel my health declining. I had cramps in my stomach and, shaking. I didn't want to wait any longer. I asked Helen to take me to the doctor. I could hardly walk. She helped me into the car. Helen was so beautiful – she was also a director of the Co. On the way to the doctor's she said, "No one will do anything about them Kathy. Kathy I wish Ruby would just die." This lovely lady would never talk ill of anyone. We got to the Doctor's and she had to speak for me. Dr Pilger was angry. He gave me a prescription and time off. As we walked out he looked at me and said, "WE'LL GET THEM."

I went back to work. Craig walked into the Production Office and said, "You look terrible Kathy." Anyway, Joe finally had time to see me. He asked me to come up and see him in the Crow's Nest.

The Crow's Nest was the problem solver for the need for more space as the Co. was expanding. It was far up heavy blue metal stairs. All you could hear was clunk, clunk, clunk, when people climbed them. What an effort it was to get up there. The Crow's Nest was so hot in the summer with so much glass. But from this vantage point you could oversee everything that was going on.

I asked Colleen if she would come with me to meet with Joe. When we were finally in the Crows Nest I said, "Joe do something about those women." He said nothing. I handed him my diary. He flicked through it, reading a few pages at random. Then he said, "Ha, Ruby not screaming today." He thought it was funny. Colleen said softly, "He's laughing." He thought it was funny. Then he began his speech. "I have spoken to Ruby and Alison and I am obliged to bring in counselors, but I want to first ask you, 'Do you want to leave?'" I said, "No." I couldn't believe him. He asked me again. I said, "No". I looked at him and said, "Joe you be very careful of those two women." He said "Ha," and shrugged his shoulders, dismissing my comment. He then told me to go home and have a rest. Of course looking back now, he didn't want a stress claim and by me leaving his problem would be gone, but I was determined that Ruby and Alison wouldn't win once again over an employee.

I went downstairs and walked to my car. I remember Brendan came running out to me from his factory desk. He said, "See you Kathy." He knew what was wrong.

I went home. The day really was a nightmare and the night even worse.

## **and the walls came tumbling down**

The first night was really bad. It's all in the diary. Dr. Pilger sent me to Dr. McQueen (my psychiatrist) and he put me on antidepressants and gave me medical certificates. Then the WorkCover insurance Investigator came to see me, and took a statement. They take statements from different staff members. Ruby. Alison. Joe. Hans. Colleen. Of course Lucy wanted no part in it. I still remember her words. "I don't want to get involved." Who cares? Who needs you? You then go to the insurance doctor to be assessed. All this makes you worse. You are always trying to prove you're innocent and you know the lies that will be told about you. Again good old Colleen stood up to be counted. I especially named Ruby as the bully and not Alison as I knew Ruby would crumble if she had to carry this load on her own. And she did crumble.

Zenner Insurance took responsibility for my stress claim. For the first two or three months I had Zenner send a lady named Jackie from Rehabilitation to take care of me. She was a lovely lady.

Ruby fell in a heap. So funny. I remember Lucy telling me that she was talking to Alison and Ruby was in a state. She pointed to Ruby and said, "Look Lucy, poor Ruby. It's not fair." What a joke. Jackie called around to see me. "Hi Jackie." "How are you Kath?" "Not bad. A bit tired and not interested in doing anything. I have no energy." "How about going for a walk?" "Okay" So I did. I just wanted to get better. I really didn't want to go back to work, but the thought of not seeing the other staff, and Ruby and Alison winning kept me going. Joe rang a couple of times to see how I was. Priscilla his wife rang me too. She made me feel a lot better but I wasn't good.

Jackie came again to see me. I got a cup of tea for her. "We had a talk to Joe and he is willing to let you answer the switch downstairs until you are strong enough to go back to Reception." "Oh good" "How do you feel about that?" "Very nervous. Alison frightens me. Have you spoken to Ruby?" "Yes." "What's she like?" She looked at me, not saying much. "Very fragile." I thought to myself, "What happened to the bully?" "Alison is another kettle of fish." She rolled her eyes. "We met her in the boardroom." I knew she couldn't go into detail. "Two other staff from Zenner and myself attended. We walked out the front door and just looked at each other. One of them said to me, "What the hell was that?" meaning Alison. I just smiled. I knew what she meant. She would be thriving on all of this. Anyway she gave me a date to start and Dr. McQueen approved it on staggered hours.

I had one week to go. My stomach churned all the time but I was determined. Colleen rang me the week before.

Hi Kath.

Hi Colleen

I hear you are coming back.

Yeah.

How about coming into work for morning tea on Friday?

Colleen I can't. I'm too frightened.

I'll meet you at the front gate and walk down with you - everyone wants to see you.

Okay 10.00.

We hung up

Friday morning came. I had to stop twice and control my nerves. It's hard to walk back into a place where you had such trauma. I got to Lodown and Colleen was waiting at the gate. We both walked in. It was great. They all came down to see me. I was in the tearoom and I heard this soft little voice over the PA. "Shaun Church, telephone call on line 9." I just looked at Colleen. Colleen smiled and said, "Yeah have a listen to her. So nice it's sickening." I couldn't believe it.

### **cat amongst the pigeons**

Morning tea finished and Colleen and I were in the factory talking. Something made me look around. I saw Ruby at the top of the stairs. What a pathetic sight she was. Hanging on to the rails - each step an effort. She saw me. I could see the panic in her face. I couldn't even hate her. Here was this woman hardly able to walk down the stairs. This woman who used to send me on her messages having to go down to the factory and be among all those idiots, fools and arseholes that she would not acknowledge. This bully brought down to size.

I didn't even say anything to Colleen - it wasn't worth a mention. I got home and the phone rang. It was Craig. "Hi Craig." "Boy did you put a cat among the pigeons." "What do you mean?" "When you had gone, Ruby went upstairs. She was uncontrollable - screaming hysterically. 'She's back, she's back. Now everyone will blame me'. She was so bad they had to send her home in a taxi." I laughed. "Good, how wonderful."

This was the start of everything getting unstuck. Hans rang Alison. He said he tried to talk to her but she kept screaming at him. He hung up on her. On the Monday he went into the main office to talk to them. Joe was in Sydney. There was a screaming match. I think Hans took this opportunity to do something. Hans told them to leave the premises and not to come back until notified. Alison wanted to go and turn her Computer off. I wonder why? He told her just to get her bag and go. They left and the story goes on from there. So much happened.

## fraud

David would pick up my wages from Lodown. One afternoon he came home and came up to me and said, "Hans has put Ruby and Alison off work." I stared at him. It wasn't possible. I asked him to repeat it. "Hans has stood down Ruby and Alison." I was so happy I couldn't believe it.

Hans rang me the next day. He said the office was in a shambles. I still remember what he said and remember thinking, "You really don't understand do you?" He said, "I have stood down Ruby and Alison so now that they have gone it won't effect you being at work." He had no idea of the damage done.

He told me that the accountant had checked things on the computer and had found that they have been stealing from the company. So much unfolded through time. Alison had taken money from every avenue possible to the extent that there was another company in Melbourne that Lodown had and they knew nothing about. Through the months following they had a large chest full of information.

Ruby had been fed enough from Alison to keep her quiet. One thing I don't understand is one day Alison was not in. They needed a cheque and there were no signed cheques with Alison's signature. Ruby called me aside and told me to keep what she was going to show me quiet. She signed Alison's signature to an exact T. She must have taken the trouble to practice it and I often wondered why.

## return to work

I was ready to go back to work. What a feeling. No Ruby. No Alison. I arrived at work. I got kisses downstairs. Everyone was so happy. Funny, I noticed that Trevor was the only one who said nothing to me. I saw the look on his face and it told me everything. I knew why.

I went upstairs. Priscilla came with me. Joe was at his desk. He got up and kissed me. He seemed stressed. I went to Reception and Hans came up to me and kissed me too. He seemed stressed too. The time passed and the boys turned up. Then the fun began. I didn't feel too bad. Lucy turned up. Mohammed and Derek were in the main office. Such laughs. Everyone felt free. So many smiles.

"They're gone Kathy. Isn't it great?" Derek had photocopied Ruby's last saying on her calendar. "Show love to someone today." He gave everyone a copy. "This is from Ruby." Someone else was swinging on Ruby's chair. Then we were in and out of Alison's office and through her desk. Derek swung on her chair. We were all laughing.

Derek said, "Can't you feel the evil in here?" I said, "We should hang some garlic over the door." It felt so good. What a payback. We went back to work. Morning tea and the boys came back. Priscilla was going through Ruby's statement about me. She turned to me and smiled. "I have to tell you Kathy. I'm reading Ruby's statement and she read out something Ruby wrote: "Kathy thinks I am after her husband." I looked. "What?" I knew what it was about. A couple of times Ruby answered the phone when David rang. She would say something to him. I would turn and say to her, "I think you fancy my David" 'Joke.' Then the stories all started to come out.

"Priscilla, do you know you used to be a call girl?" She looked at me. "Yeah." "Oh yes ... your cheek bones are false." Everyone was laughing. We went back to work. So much to do. The place was a mess. We worked hard. A few days passed. Every day the phone rang. I answered. "SMASH." Time and time again through the day ... the same thing. I knew it was Alison. We had a laugh. Alison says, "Hi everyone." They laughed.

I was at my desk and Joe and Hans were in and out of the office doors, opening and shutting. It unnerved me. Hans called me into his office. He looked concerned. He began to talk to me about Ruby and Alison and court. He said to me: "It won't affect your case." I didn't know what he meant. "Hans, I'm not suing. Do you think I am?" He nodded but said nothing. I couldn't believe it. "Did Alison tell you that?" He nodded again. "Hans, she is such a liar. I wouldn't do that to you, please tell Joe." I walked out.

After this things were relaxed. Joe and Hans were at ease. We were checking Ruby and Alison's files. Oh, such hypocrites. Poems about happiness and love. You wonder why they could see beauty in these words yet show such ugliness to everyone around them.

Ruby's son rang. He was in a state. He asked for Joe. Next thing I knew Priscilla and Joe were going over to Ruby's house. The next day Hans called me into his office. "Ruby is in a bad way." Joe said she was crouched in the corner in the foetal position. "Good. I hope she suffers." They couldn't get in touch with Alison. Alison had been harassing Ruby, leaving messages. Ruby taped them. "You better answer Ruby. You're in this as much as me. We need to get our stories straight." Ruby was frightened of her. They had both put in stress claims.

Of course, Alison wasn't seeing a psychiatrist. She goes to a Psychologist. Alison could never see a psychiatrist. There was so much going on. I felt very tired but I kept going.

Lucy was working hard trying to keep the place going. She did such a good job. I noticed Lucy writing out cheques. She was starting to write out cheques for Ruby and Alison's sick pay. "Lucy let me do that in my hand writing, that should really get up their noses." Oh how good that felt. Everyone was still on a high for weeks. We all went out for dinner at a Restaurant - about twenty of us - to celebrate.

I was very nervy all the time and tired. There were meetings with Ruby. The accountant, Phillip, had moved to Melbourne and taken over Alison's job. He had gone through the books. Alison had helped herself to money from every corner possible. Bogus names on the pay sheets, petty cash receipts missing, extra super. She never worked Fridays but paid herself heaps of Fridays. No sick pay deducted, cheques not corresponding with invoices, and so on. She worked on two cheque-books for both companies. Jumping dates, jumping cheques. Cheques folded and signed. She had invoices everywhere.

A total mess for a good reason. She had paid herself overtime. Her son and daughter had been paid money. Holiday pay. Joe thought they were coming in to do school work ... and paid a couple of days at Xmas to wrap Xmas gifts. I noticed Ruby and Alison had been given bonuses. Alison had \$1,000.00 and Ruby \$500.00. I checked with Hans. He came back later and Joe confirmed it was legitimate. Ruby was helping herself to petrol, extra money each week. All this went back ten to twelve years.

But it was obvious Alison had been giving enough to keep Ruby quiet so she could not say anything. Alison always covered herself. Alison had put in two insurance claims for injury at work. One of them I had signed. I remember the day. Alison came out of her office and said to me, "Here sign this." "What is it? "Oh it's not important. I just hit me arm on the filing cabinet. You saw it." I looked at her. "It's nothing, just sign it." You didn't overrule Alison when she demanded something, so I signed it. She did the same thing with another employee. The list went on and on.

Finally they managed to get a meeting with Alison and her husband. I don't know what went on but Hans said she was real smug at the meeting. He said he wouldn't stop till he found out how she paid for the Mercedes. He knew Lodown paid. Also, he said when Alison was talking to them she mentioned the Mercedes, calling it a Co. car. That would have been to cover up because Henry was there and she would have told him that the Co paid for it.

Weeks passed and Alison's claim was rejected. Ruby had dropped hers. Alison had still got the cheek to notify Lodown about Conciliation. Joe had his solicitor ringing and come in for meetings. They were having meetings with Ruby. She was desperate to come back - she needed the money. They just seemed to leave her hanging, yet Priscilla told me she definitely wouldn't be back.

Weeks passed and Lucy asked me if I would get Joe to sign something for her. So I went down and Joe signed it. As I was going back to the office I noticed Lucy's name on it. It was Superannuation contributions. Lucy's name was with Joe and Hans's names. I was curious. When I got back to the office I asked her, "How come you pay so much Super?" She looked at me. Silent. "What?" I said. "Kathy, Hans and Joe called me into Joe's office." "Yeah." "They asked me to do Alison's job and offered me a large raise." I looked at her. I thought, 'That's fine but Phillip was doing Alison's job.'. She said, "I told them I didn't really want to do the job and then Hans said to me, 'Take it as appreciation for what you have done for us.'" I couldn't believe what I heard. I said, "In appreciation for what you have done for them? I have all these years of harassment. I'm sick. I have never thrown it up at them and they appreciate what you have done for them?"

I have never known anything like the anger I felt. I left the office. My hands were clenched, my body was so stiff. My face and chest were red. I walked down to the toilet. Such anger. I felt like my head would burst. I walked back to the office still clenching my fists. Lucy looked at me and said nothing. I was shaking uncontrollably. I couldn't do anything about it. I keep repeating to myself, "In appreciation for what Lucy did?" I was silent. The trembling passed. I continued to work.

As time wore on, Joe walked into the office. He went to say something. I said, "You've really kicked me in the teeth Joe." He looked at me. "You give Lucy a pay rise and you haven't even thought of me. It's not the money. Money has never been an issue for me." He looked at me. My hands were shaking. I could tell he genuinely hadn't done it on purpose. "I just never thought Kathy ... there are guys downstairs and they haven't had a raise in two years." "Joe it's been four years for me." "Yes Kathy, I know you have been working hard too." I looked at him. I refused to use my sickness as blackmail. "I'll fix it up Kathy, you're right". I looked at him and thought, "You just don't get it do you? You really don't."

Anyway I received a fifty dollar raise. From that day my health declined. I put it aside but never forgot it. I continued to go to Dr. McQueen on a fortnightly basis.

Moira began to work in the office. She was Hans' niece. She was young but seemed ok. Then they advertised for an office assistant. Theresa started full time. She was a little lady and was Italian. Lucy and Theresa worked together between the two companies. Theresa was on a much smaller salary than Lucy. From the day Theresa started she had strange behaviour. She would not leave Lucy's side. She would follow Lucy around everywhere. If Joe asked Lucy something Theresa would jump out of her seat and stand beside Lucy and if Lucy came to the Reception where I was Theresa would follow her over. If I can pick body language I would say she was making sure she was on equal billing with Lucy. She wasn't going to be No.2. Lucy taught her everything.

They bought another Co and Moira did the work for that Co. Lucy and Theresa worked well together and as Theresa learnt the job she made sure she was heard and started to slowly push herself forward. We all got on well. No bitching or back-biting. Hans would ask Lucy and myself if all was well, as he didn't want another re-run. I was getting sicker so I began to cover it up with humour. We really did have a lot of fun. Theresa was good company and I really liked her. Lunchtimes, the guys would come in to the office. We would tell stories and jokes. Joe would walk in and you could tell he loved to hear us laughing. We would get pizzas on Fridays. We were all so effected by the past that you would think that we just wanted to make up for the horrible years we all put in - we just appreciated each other.

Hans and Joe were much more at ease and I got to know Hans so much more. They were great bosses. Hans would have a chat and laugh with us and the Co. was expanding because Hans wasn't being held back by Alison. Joe still had his temper outbursts regularly but they didn't affect me. I knew they would be over soon. He loved practical jokes and always had a story to tell. I found it became a continual battle for me to try to act normal. I tried to keep happy and looked upon it as my problem. I could fight it as I enjoyed work so much. So many happy days.

This sickness creeps into you so slowly - it is such a gradual decline. I continued to see Dr. McQueen every fortnight. At work I found the more I could make people laugh the more I could hide behind the humour. On two occasions I was sent to the Insurance Doctor. On the last occasion I was in a state, crying. He told me I didn't have to see him again but said I would be on medication for a long time. At home I was at my worst. I tried so hard to be happy but the sadness just drags you down. I had good days, bad days, good nights, and bad nights. It was a continual battle I had to fight. It just never stopped. It is with you day and night. There is no relief. Not one day. Always trying to hide my sickness from everyone in my life. It takes away every bit of strength you have. On a few occasions Hans would ask how I was. "How are you Kathy?" "Yeah Hans I'm good." "Are you off you're tablets yet?" "No." "What happens if you go off them?" "I go ratty and cry all the time." I knew he didn't understand and I also knew he was concerned about me still being on medication. I was like a time bomb to them. But I had no intentions of doing the wrong thing by them. I hadn't fallen into the hole yet.

Then I have never seen such a twist in office politics. Theresa started zooming in on Lucy and coming down heavy on her. Theresa completely changed and she went on a recruitment campaign. She would confide in Lucy about Moira, then when Lucy was out of the office she was over at Moira bitching about Lucy. Then she would tell each of them what the other one had said about them. It was a work of art. She wanted to put a wedge between them. Then she started on me. I must admit she had me for a couple of days. She was so good and I must admit I liked being with the pack. It felt so safe but I just couldn't do it. Lucy wouldn't hurt anyone - she was just a lovely lady, not a nasty bone in her body. Theresa continued confiding in Lucy and repeating things to Moira then she worked on Phillip and got him on side. I could see the game. I had a word with Lucy. "Be careful what you say to Theresa - she is repeating everything you say to Moira and Philip." She just stared at me. The more Theresa continued this behaviour the worse I got. They would laugh at Lucy and make fun of her - it was non stop-. I have no doubt they laughed at me too. I couldn't blame them. Theresa didn't give up on me. She tried time and time again. Then she moved her program downstairs and recruited Sarah. What skill she had. She would twist things that Lucy had done and said. The lies were flowing from her mouth so smoothly.

I tried to support Lucy but still got on well with the girls. I wanted no part of it as I had my own problems. I just couldn't believe it was happening again. Lucy was beginning to be effected by this treatment and she also had bad problems at home with her son. Lucy began to make mistakes and when this begins to happen they have you right where they want you. They finally have something on you. They have a reason for their behaviour and they can use it to defend themselves. The three of them gave her a bad time it was obvious they wanted her gone. It became obvious that Theresa and Moira knew everything that was going on behind the scenes through Philip. By this stage Lucy was beginning to hum all day to herself and would talk to herself while on the Computer. She was terrified of making mistakes.

In the next few days I approached Lucy and told her I was going to see Joe about the treatment she was getting. I went in to Joe's office. "Joe there is trouble in the office between the girls and Lucy and it is effecting Lucy and if you don't do something about it you will have another stress case on you're hands." Joe looked up at me and said he knew nothing about it. "I'll look into it."

The weeks go on and on and nothing was done about it. It's so bad my health gets worse. I am very vague all the time and I get comments like, "Kathy you should have been a blond." What could I say to them? They wouldn't understand anyway. I didn't understand so how could anyone else. It just never stops. I have my first bad night. My dose of antidepressants has been increased. I rang the girls on Monday and told them I would not be in as the situation in work has got me down. When I went back to work I wasn't going to say anything to Joe and have a normal sickie, but I thought 'why should I?' Joe was in his office so I went in. He looked up at me. "Yes Kathy!" "Joe I had a day off on WorkCover as I wasn't feeling well." Well did he start.

“Jesus Kathy if I have to go through all that shit again I’ll close the doors of the factory.” “Joe I’ll be fine.” He continues, “I can’t go through all that shit again.” I was used to his outbursts. Five minutes later he could be laughing with you about something. I walked out.

I suppose by now you are wondering “Why doesn’t she just leave?” It’s not that simple. Work is an escape too. Even though you are detached from everyone there is still a world beside you. If I had no work there would be nothing - just emptiness. Your health is so bad that you go with the flow and don’t have any strength to fight. You just live day to day. No use looking for another job because you would not get one. You’re just too sick and you can’t walk out because you can’t cope with any more problems. You just don’t have an ounce of strength left in you.

## back home

I had different moods at home. Sometimes, I would be numb, sometimes angry. No control. Sometimes okay. Just different, from one day to the next. I'll tell you about the silent nights.

I come home from work. My mind is racing. No memory, no concentration. I feel like I am in a spinning tunnel. I make dinner and David comes home. He walks in and gives me a kiss. He starts to talk to me.

Are you okay?

I look blankly at him.

Yeah.

You sure?

Yes, I'm okay.

Poor David. He is so patient. He looks after me. Never complains. He doesn't know about these nights. I won't tell him.

Anyway, I try to converse but I really don't care. I feel numb. So sad.

After dinner we watch TV. I am in my own world. Then the blackness starts to creep over me. I hate it. I have one, two, three, four drinks. I am in that hole again. I have to hide it from David. The sadness, so sad I can't explain. David sits beside me. The tears are streaming down my face. David asks me something. I try to answer normally. The night goes on and David kisses me and goes to bed.

Now I can drink more. **I have to try to numb this sadness. The sadness was all about the cruelty of the people who hurt me. I don't understand why if someone has not done anything to you... why? Why is Teresa hurting Lucy? What did I ever do to Ruby? I cling on so tight to the friendship with Colleen. It means so much to me. She didn't care about anyone but me when she helped me. She was so strong and loyal.**

I drink more. The more I drink the deeper I go. I hate this world. It's so black. I don't want to live anymore. I know I will never get out. I don't know how much I have drunk. I cry and cry. Then I pray to God so desperately. *Please let me die. I can't live like this anymore. Please take me.* I know people get out through taking tablets, but I don't know how many. What if I wake up? I can't cope with people knowing. *Please God please help me. I can't go on. I have no power over these feelings.*

*My mind is in charge. I don't control my mind anymore. My mind controls me.* Then I drink so much I fall asleep and no longer know I exist. How wonderful it feels not existing.

It was only David that copped it.

I'd have had a few drinks and once again my mind was racing. I am angry at the world. The night wears on. I ask David a question. He answers. No. Sorry David. Wrong answer. I ask another question. Another wrong answer. I get angry. I am angry about past events. Someone has to hurt like me. Why should I be the only one? More questions. I become so angry I start to scream at him. He is silent. I don't care. I can't control this anger. I want to fight. He just sits there. I want to hurt someone too. I am sick of being hurt. He goes to bed and the usual thing happens. Another night crying desperately in despair. I want to hurt and hate too. I feel so sorry for myself. Why me? What did I do? I trust no one.

**We are on holidays. You'd think this would be good. I am so sick. I stand on the balcony, crying. I am in this world completely alone. No, I'm not in this world - that's the problem. I can't think straight. Who wants to live like this? I am crying. I look over the balcony. Oh how easy, the end of my problems. I want so much to do it. God knows how much. I sit studying the balcony. Why don't I have the courage? Next morning, I don't know what had happened. I know it was bad but I asked no questions. I am out of control. I have no control over my body or mind. I know I am totally mad. Thank you so much Ruby.**

When I was off work the first time I suffered from paranoia. Not a lot but something might trigger it off. You know you are over reacting but can't control it. It's the mind again - playing these mental games with you. Funny, you know when I look back like this. You have these people turning on you and playing their games, then you can't even trust your own mind either - it turns on you too. Anyway I'll try to explain. You know in the past when something like this happens it is not important, but this time it is different.

David had gone to the local football. He was not home at 7.00pm. My mind was racing. I didn't want anything to happen to him. I knew I wouldn't cope. What could I do? I know he is in a ditch. Maybe he has drunk too much. I know he is in trouble. He may have been dead. I have to help him. I ring my nephew. "Patrick...Something has happened to David. Please check for me." I am so upset "He'll be okay." "No, please Pat."... "Okay, I'll go and find him." I pace about, waiting. "I'll ring the hospital." They answer. "Has anyone been admitted by the name of O'Brien?" "One moment. I'll check." She came back. "No, no one by that name." I hung up. I was beside myself. I know he is dead. I am crying. The door opens. It is David. I look at him and realize how stupid I've been. I can see it clearly now. The phone rings. It's my nephew. He has searched everywhere. I apologise to him. "David is here. He walked home after he had a drink with the boys. Sorry." I felt so stupid, yet it was all so real to me before he walked in.

You live each day detached from the world as if by a glass wall. This wall never comes down. It never allows you to feel your husband's arms around you or your children's hugs. Then on the bad days this world in front of you begins to disappear. Nothing and no-one exists. You look into nothing. It's all gone. Then that empty world begins to turn black, then the blackness starts to creep under the wall and begins to turn your world black. Time goes by and all that exists is the wall, and the blackness, and you.

Then the ground beneath you begins to open up and you slide deeper and deeper into this blackness, and through all this you cry in total despair and beg and beg for someone to help you. My someone was GOD. You reach the bottom of this pit and there you are all alone in this cold, black hell, still crying and praying.

You have no self worth, no dignity left. You just exist. This is when suicide comes in. It's not the easy way out. Far from it. It is the only way out. If you get through the night, you tell no-one about this place because the shame is too much to bear. Each time you visit this hell the decision becomes easier because death means peace.

## workplace meetings

The first meeting about the fighting. Lucy approached me and said her husband Ricky had rung Joe and demanded that he do something. So that was when the first meeting took place.

We were all called into the Boardroom. Helen, Joe and Priscilla, Theresa, Moira, Lucy and myself. Theresa and Moira sat side by side. Theresa's body language said it all. Her arms were folded over her chest and she was leaning back on her chair. Moira was red in the face and Lucy had her head down and I felt so tense. I'm not well.

Joe began to speak. No reply. He asked Lucy to talk. Lucy said, "I just want to know what I've done to you two. Why are you treating me like this?" She was upset and trying not to cry. Moira had a great reason. "I don't like you calling me 'love'." Joe said, "I don't think Lucy calling you 'love' is a bad thing." Then I said, "Lucy is getting sick, can't you see that?" No answer. More talk about nothing. The meeting was dismissed.

After these meetings I was beginning to get resentful, together with Joe's comment about the door. I thought, 'Joe knows I am sick yet I have to attend the meetings about the fighting. And he also knows I am not involved but I am too sick to stand up for myself and cause any waves.' And Lucy and myself were asked to consider a redundancy after the loyalty we had shown.

There was trouble in the Boardroom. Joe was screaming and yelling at Damien. Damien was a guy that worked in the Program room. He smoked dope and walked around in a daze all day. Anyway the meeting finished. Joe was livid. The next day Damien came up to me at the Rec. "Is Hans in yet?" "No not yet." Time passed and Hans, Joe, and Damien are in Hans' office. After fifteen minutes Damien walked out. Lucy came to me and said, "Guess what?" "What?" "Damien has received a \$100.00 a week raise." I said, "I bet we don't hear another thing about his claim again" and guess what, we didn't.

There was more and more bitching, whispering. Lucy had a screaming match with Phillip and she was crying. She was under her local doctor and on antidepressants. She told me her doctor wanted to ring Joe but Lucy wouldn't let him.

I had another day off. I rang and told the girls that the workplace environment had got to me. Apparently the girls told Joe and Hans. When I arrived they called me into the Boardroom. Priscilla was there too. Joe and Hans were both agitated. Hans looked at me. "You told me you were okay. Okay to me was not suicidal." I tried to explain. "I don't see things like you do. I am not in a normal

mind. It is much bigger to me, and with the girls fighting, I am re-living it all again. I had years of harassment from Ruby and Alison.” Hans puts his head down. Nothing from Joe. After that comment they said, “Okay thanks.”

The Redundancy meetings were going on. My head was spinning.

Joe was out of control. His anger was getting worse. He yelled, swore, threw tantrums. It was non-stop. He was going for tests for his health. So concerned for himself. It was three weeks of total crap. He got the results. Nothing wrong. During this time Ricky rang me at Lodown. “Are they giving Lucy a hard time or is she imagining it?” “No Ricky, they won’t leave her alone.” Ricky said, “I am going to come in there and punch that old woman Phillip in the face.”

I started having panic attacks. I thought I couldn’t afford to leave, and I knew I would never get another job. My mind was gone and I didn’t think logically but I could see that I was in big trouble.

I began to start my diary again. I knew I wouldn’t be here much longer. Not even David knew. I came so close the last time. I wanted out. I had no life.

Joe called another meeting. He was coming down heavy about the fighting. Oh what a wonderful solution he had come up with. This is the answer to all his problems. We were in the Boardroom once again. I was sitting there thinking, “Why am I being dragged in here? I’m not involved but I have no strength to stand up for myself.” Oh if only I could go back with the state of mind I have now. I couldn’t take any more drama related to me. I was truly a shell ready to crumble.

It went like this. Joe was taking the rough approach.

I’ve had enough. If you don’t want to work here then go.

Priscilla backed him and talked to the three girls. I was sitting beside him. He turned to me and said: “And Kathy, if it is affecting you, I will not move the Reception or Switch downstairs. (This is what he agreed to do when I was coming back.) Then he said: “If it is affecting you ... SHUT THE DOOR.”

The meeting was over. Nothing changed and he couldn’t care less.

After this Priscilla and Helen came in a few times and brought Lucy into the storeroom and shut the door. Boy if you could see Theresa. She started to get agitated. I loved this part, this woman was a marvel ... a total natural. I saw her with Helen talking quietly and she did the rounds with a few of the girls, but I was not quite sure what she was doing. Then it was my turn. She came up to me at the Reception. “Kathy, I am really concerned about Lucy.” “Why Theresa?” “Lucy is imagining things. I

think her mind is playing tricks on her. She thinks I want her out and thinks I am giving her a bad time yet all I want to do is help her.” I looked at her and said nothing. I thought: “You little creep.”

Her concern stopped only when Priscilla and Helen stopped talking to Lucy. Funny you know, apart from what she was doing to Lucy she really was good company, and quite a nice lady. I still got on well with her and we all had some great days still.

I was still seeing Dr. McQueen. My tablets were increasing all the time. I didn’t mind going to Dr McQueen. He understood what I was going through. He didn’t look strangely at me when I had a weird day.

The panic attacks started. I stumbled over my words. My memory was bad. I was a total mess. I tried harder and harder to hide it but I couldn’t hide it in the office.

Another meeting. We were all called in again. The workload had gone down in the office but only between Lucy and Theresa’s work. They were both on ridiculous salaries. He was offering a redundancy of \$8,000.00.

After the meeting the four of us were so tense. Every man for himself. But suddenly it all added up. Theresa, Phillip and Moira had known about this for a while, that was why they had been pushing Lucy out.

During this time the meetings with the QC’s were taking place. Joe’s Solicitor was in and out of the building for meetings with Joe and Hans. They wanted Alison to continue with her claim but they had to produce evidence for Mitchells about Lodown. They tried to keep it to a minimum - they didn’t want Alison to back out.

They had to produce some of the evidence that she had stolen money. Sure enough she backed out real quick. They were not proceeding.

She knew they had found things on her. We kept getting more and more, and detailing it all. The stories came from time to time. One of the guys lived in the same street as her. Hans came to me. “Well poor old Alison has been seen walking down Greensborough with a scarf and sunglasses on and it’s winter” Oh how I love this. The iron lady is cracking. He said, “Alex saw her climbing up the stairs to her house and said she looked like an old lady struggling to get up.” “Oh Hans how wonderful.” I can just imagine her mind. My God, the disgrace - everyone will know what she has done. Her mind must be tormented. Good.

Things got even worse in the main office.

The Police were ringing Hans and he was seeing them. They wanted all the evidence. A letter arrived for Joe. It was from the Police asking about the Fraud case. They wanted to proceed.

Then a strange thing happened.

I was at my desk and the Police rang for Joe. I told him it was the Police, so he went into his office upstairs so he could talk to them without anyone downstairs listening. I heard, "What? Ruby was supposed to have immunity. They weren't going to prosecute her." He was panicking. Then he said, "She's not a bad person and I am frightened she might have a breakdown."

I was at my desk and I couldn't believe what I was hearing. 'Not a bad person and he was concerned she might have a breakdown.' Why is he always so concerned about her? He hung up and yelled out to me to get Hans on the phone. I put Hans through. He said: "Hans, I've been talking to the Police and they say they are going to prosecute Ruby as well as Alison. I told them Ruby was given immunity but they said they want to nail the both of them."

I was so angry. He hung up and went back downstairs. I went down to Craig's office and I was so angry. I told Craig what he said. Craig just shook his head. Then I said "What does he F... think I had?"

## **the court hearing**

By this time not only Lucy and myself were bad, but I could see signs that both Moira and Theresa were becoming stressed too, because of the situation and nothing being done about it.

My memory was starting to fail, so I would double-check my costings and always put the messages down straight away, and had yellow slips over the switchboard. Joe had no complaints - the only thing I couldn't do was remember the day before, or that morning, if he asked about someone ringing. There was nothing I could do about it but I thought no use worrying about it - it's you're fault I'm like it.

The girls were fighting. Lucy was talking to herself. Every day I struggled with my mind, trying to hide it. The Court case, facing Ruby and Alison, suicide, abuse from Joe and after his outburst, knowing that I had to hide it from Joe.

The Court day arrived for Alison's appeal for stress. Joe and Hans went and Priscilla. We were all waiting to know what had gone on. Hans arrived back. It had been adjourned. Hans said, "All eyes were on the QC's arriving for such a small case". He didn't say much more. Priscilla came in. She liked to talk. She began talking to me. She said Alison sent word to Joe through her Solicitor that if they gave her \$40,000.00 she would not tell about Joe's tax evasion.

I looked at Priscilla. "Oh yeah, sure, as if Joe would have tax evasion on him."

## healing

About four months before I got better I began to turn to God. I went back to church. I needed comfort. Perhaps I could get peace through God. I didn't get overly religious, but when you are so sick and nothing or no one can help you, it is so strange how we search for some spiritual comfort.

I began to use Holy Water everyday. I would spray the house and myself without fail. In a short time I noticed a strange thing happening. My angry moods subsided. I had control over them. I noticed how calm David became. I was still declining in my health. One Sunday, while I was coming out of church I noticed a piece of paper on the table in the foyer. It was a photocopy - hand written in very small writing. It was a prayer to the Holy Spirit. It read:

### *Prayer to the Holy Spirit*

*Holy Spirit. Thou who makes me see everything and shows me the way to reach the ideal. Thou who gives me the divine gift to forgive and forget the wrong that is done to me and who are in all instances in my life with me. I in the short dialogue want to thank you for everything and confirm once more that I never want to separate from you no matter how great the material desire may be. I want to be with you and my loved ones in your perpetual glory. Amen.*

Then at the bottom it reads, 'Say this prayer each day and your wish will be granted no matter how difficult it may be. Promise to publish this as soon as this favour has been granted'.

I took it home and began a ritual. I had begun to have faith in this water through what I was witnessing, so each morning I would say my prayer in front of the picture of the Sacred Heart I had, and use the water and ask for a healing. I would ask Jesus to please give me back my mind. I refused to give up and never went a day without doing this.

## **feeling better (pulled out ... thank God!)**

How do I explain that split second when I stepped out of my lonely world and into the real world? All it took was a blink. One split second and I had left that world of sadness, just like someone had reached out, held my hand and pulled me out. Everything I had prayed for night after night had happened in a blink of an eye. This new clear world appeared ... so crystal clear.

The peace I craved for was with me. My memory was back.

Only one hour before I was hiding in a storeroom trembling and shaking. I was at my desk only seconds before - living in complete paranoia, my head spinning and my mind racing trying so desperately to fight but knew it had such a hold on me. Then the sensation that something strange was happening to my body, and a rippling sensation started to go through me and 3 or 4 seconds later. In a blink I knew without the slightest doubt that I wasn't sick anymore. I ran around telling everyone and kissing them. It seems so funny now to look back and remember their faces staring, and I remember thinking to my self, "Why aren't they happy for me?" But I didn't care I was so excited.

From that moment I was free. To be in a normal mind was the greatest feeling. The exhilaration and excitement was incredible. This was a whole new experience. I could think normally. No more trying to hide my secret. I could converse without having to concentrate. I drove my car and I was here with everyone else. I did shopping that afternoon, so excited because of the ease of it. I remembered to get my prescription I had put in. I would normally go home and then have to go back to pick it up.

David opened the front door. I hugged him and told him I wasn't sick anymore. I knew he just thought it was another one of my erratic times, but I didn't care because I knew he would soon see. My daughter was at home and for the first time in years I saw her so clear, like a veil had been pushed away from my face. How beautiful she looked.

The next morning I woke up - still in this clear world and still so excited. We drove to the country. I couldn't wait to see my sister-in-law, as she too had used the Holy Water and she was experiencing the same thing as me, but in a different way. I could see these beautiful trees, the clouds, but the clarity of them was so beautiful, everything I saw and heard was so new to me. For three days I was in this amazing world.

Then panic set in. I was coming down to reality and once again I prayed and prayed not to fall down into the hole again. It didn't happen. I was normal like everyone else, with a whole life ahead of me. Then you realize what had happened and there is no explanation. You realize all those black nights

you felt so alone and all those prayers and tears that there was someone there with their arms around you. You weren't alone. Someone encouraging you not to give up because they knew you believed in that one person who you knew would never turn on you, who understood, the only person you had left to help you. GOD

I was at my worst. I had had bad nights. The day started as usual. I was ready to go to work. I sprayed myself with the Holy Water and stood in front of the Sacred Heart. I crossed my forehead with the water and asked to be healed. I had such faith in this water. I got to work and took out the prayer to the Holy Spirit and read it then asked again. I went through my day - 'don't forget this or that', 'act normal', 'don't laugh too much', 'try to be calm, remember, remember'.

The morning started. I trembled inside. The girls arrived - it was so tense. I hid how I felt but my mind was turning and turning. I could hear the girl's squabbling. It's happening again. I'm back with Ruby and Alison. "Why don't they stop?" I tremble more. I can't answer the phone. I run into the office. "Theresa, I have to go to the storeroom. I'm having an attack." The girls know about them as I have been having them a lot and only at work. My whole body would tremble and I would have to crouch down. Every inch of your dignity is gone. I knew it would pass in time. I hated it. So belittling not to have control of your own body. I went back to my desk.

Time passed. They're at it again. 'Just shut up please.' It's affecting me so much. 'Please stop,' I said to myself. It was starting again. The trembling, uncontrollable. I ran again into the storeroom. 'It's okay - it will be over soon.' I ask myself, 'What am I going to do? I can't go through life like this.' Helen opened the door. 'Are you okay?' 'Yes Helen it will pass. Don't tell Joe about this'. She shut the door.

I went back to my desk. Someone came up to talk to me. I felt nervy but I could cover it up. Then Phillip came up to me. He looked at me and said, "Kathy I've got some bad news for you." "What?" "They're not going to proceed with the fraud charges." I just looked at him. "Okay," I said to myself. "Keep in control. Try not to show emotion." Inside I was so annoyed. I wanted vengeance and it was not going to happen. They had gotten away with it. Then without any warning, I remember my vengeance and anger passed so peacefully from me.

Phillip and the other employee were still talking. The hate just left me. I felt a tingling sensation in my body. Something was strange. I slumped over. "Phillip my body feels strange...are they really not going through with it?" Then a rippling started from my feet up. It moved in seconds. I remember it hadn't completely gone through my body. I thought, "I'm not sick I'm not sick." It all seemed so clear to me. I just knew beyond any doubt. I jumped up. "Phillip I'm not sick anymore. Give me a kiss." So clear, so fresh. No heavy load on my shoulders.

So I ran around kissing everyone. I remember I was back at my desk, so happy. Phillip and Theresa were beside me. I said, "Well, that's the last panic attack I'll ever have. I remember seeing their faces. Just staring. No expression. I thought, "Why aren't they happy for me?" I didn't question it at the time - it was just such a beautiful feeling. I was free. It was all over for me.

## back in control

My life changed completely from that day. I had happiness I have never lost to this day. I was so strong. How wonderful it was to talk to someone and enjoy it with so much ease. I didn't need my humor anymore. I just enjoyed it. Oh to be in this world with everyone else. I had such independence and saw things so clearly.

I realized for the first time in my life that "I" am in control of my life and the way people treat me. No more do I ask myself, "Why do people hurt me?" The answer is so simple. "I let people hurt me." David still tried to protect me and help me but I would tell him that I was able to look after myself now, and tried to explain how wonderful it was.

The girls in the office could look after themselves ... if they wanted to act like that then who cares. It didn't worry me. Work was so easy and Joe commented to me how different I was. It was great I could remember in a flash anything he asked me. So proud of myself. I remember one day Hans was in the office. We were all talking and due to the conversation we were having I began to quote Shakespeare. He just looked at me and went into his office. The intercom rang - it was Hans. "I can't believe what you just quoted." So I began to quote some more Shakespeare and poetry. I gave him the lot. He hung up and came out of his office, nearly bumping against the wall as he turned around to me. So I gave him more poetry. 'My country', 'The daffodils', then more Shakespeare. "The quality of mercy is not strained, it dropeth as a gentle rain from heaven" and so on, I kept going.

"I can't believe it," he said. What a wonderful world it was that I was in. I began to set my life straight. Anyone that was affecting me or trying to dominate me was put in their place. It was all done assertively. It was so easy. There was one downside but I loved it because it was so safe and powerful for me. As happy and as free as I was, I was holding on firm to such a cold feeling. No one ... not one person in the world would ever get the chance to treat me even the slightest way wrong. I know if anyone tried I would have no conscience about wiping them. I would turn my back forever on them and I didn't care who it was. I would have no feeling. They would be out of my life.

Through time this subsided. I look now and perhaps it was a protection for me. My mind had been swept clear of any negative feelings ... no more hate or anger or vengeance. David continued to try to protect me but he realised eventually that I didn't need protection. I began to notice him withdrawing from me. Now he wasn't in my New World. He approached me one day and told me that he was not coping with all these weird happenings around us. I said, "I don't understand David. I'm not sick now. How could you not cope with that?" "David said, "What about everything I've been through?" I was so puzzled. "But you weren't sick?"

Through sheer luck he came with me to the Psychologist and she began to talk to him about it. I didn't like hearing how he was hurt and what he had been through because of me but I sat and listened. It was all he needed. Someone to listen to him. I bought him a card and thanked him for being there for me. I realised even though it was nothing like what I had been through it was enough to affect him. As time went on he began to settle down and began to enjoy the new wife he had, and accepted me as a person with an opinion and independence that he was no longer afraid of. Life was so good by this stage.

## the madhouse again

I would say I was about ninety per cent well but to me I was one hundred per cent well. As time went on things at work got worse and Joe was out of control. Theresa came up to me and said: "Moirra has had another pay rise - she is on the same wage as Lucy and myself. Phillip gave me a letter to give to Hans to sign. I went into Hans' office and put it on the desk in front of him. He looked up at me and said nothing and signed it. I said nothing, but once again the office staff were taking control.

I began to think things over. 'I am here for eight and an half years. I've had two wage increases. Lucy had her large wage increase for their "Appreciation." Theresa is here for three years and she is now on this ridiculous wage. Now Moira is here three years and has had two wage increases. Gordon put in a WorkCover claim and gets a \$100.00 raise for no more to be said about it.

At this stage there were a lot of problems in the factory. Three of the boys had been caught by another employee, selling dope. There had been an argument so Colin walked out. Cameron went to the doctors and next day put in a stress certificate. Joe was ropeable. Cameron came back to work. Joe had Cameron, the foreman, and himself in the Boardroom. All I could hear was screaming and swearing. Joe was abusing Cameron. It went on and on.

It was starting to affect all of us. Theresa was asked to go into the Boardroom to take minutes. What a joke. The minutes would be nothing but Joe swearing.

When she came out she said, "I was so embarrassed. Joe started abusing the guy from the Insurance company and threatening to put a stress claim in himself." I knew I had to get out of this madhouse because I would only be going down the same path again. I thought, 'I am still on WorkCover, they still pay for my medication and I still see Dr. McQueen. Maybe WorkCover will rehabilitate me somewhere else.' I still had a misguided loyalty towards Joe.

I called Lucy over. "Lucy, I'm going to ask Joe for a pay rise. I don't want anything like you three, and no offence, there isn't any justification in the wages you three are on. I would be happy with fifty dollars. I've been three and a half years since the last raise. Lucy if he says 'no' I'm out of this place. I can walk out of here without a conscience and I am strong enough to cope with whatever happens."

The screaming continued. Everyone got it. Hans stayed out of it. He knew how bad Joe was. I went into Joe's office. "Joe would you consider a pay rise for me. He looked at me. I said, "The three girls have had a raise". He answered, "I know that Lucy has had one, but I am not aware of the other girls. I'll look into it." One week goes by and nothing. Another week. I was getting angry with him.

I knew I had to get out for the sake of my health. I refused to go down that path once more. I started to tidy my files up, and my desk. I was ready to walk out. I just needed Joe to do one more thing wrong by me.

The last day arrived. I had written in my diary, "Another day in paradise." No joking or laughing today. I was ready for whatever happened.

I arrived at work and signed in. As an extra I wrote, "Another day in Paradise." I would from time to time write things like this in the book. I felt so nervous. Joe was in his office and asked me to ring the cleaner. He had had a few days off work as usual and he drank a lot and missed work. I got him and put him through to Joe. Well all I could hear is, "You're nothing but a F..... B.... You F.... shit me. I'm F....sick of this, you F.... ...F..... F.... F... It just went on and on. I got up and walked into the office.

Phillip came in. "Just lovely, isn't it?" Phillip shook his head. Joe hung up.

Time passed. The girls arrive and Joe was in his office. Lucy does the pays for Joe's side of the Co. I didn't want to talk to anyone. Lucy went into his office. I knew she was going to ask him. I had everything ready to walk out. Lucy walked out of his office and looked at me and went past the Reception and into the office. I could hear Theresa and Lucy whispering. I got up from my desk and walked into the office. They both looked at me. "What did he say Lucy?" They both looked at me. Lucy answered. "He offered twenty dollars a week". Theresa calculates on the calculator, "50c an hour Kathy." I answer, "50c an hour. I nearly commit suicide and he offers me 50c an hour." I grabbed my bags and I threw them against the wall. Theresa says, "Calm down Kathy, let's talk about this." I answered, "I'm out of this place and you can tell him I won't be back."

I grabbed my bag and walked down the corridor into the factory and out into the car park. I got into my car and as I drove down the driveway I remember feeling relief that I was out and I knew I never would return.

I felt totally betrayed.

When I got home I rang David and told him. He came home. I had a feeling of total betrayal. Then relief, mixed with anxiety, but I knew I would be okay and strong enough to go through it all. David rang the Insurance Co. They were a different Co from the first time I walked out. I watched him on the telephone. "What do you mean it's a new claim. My wife is still on WorkCover and still under a Psychiatrist...and on tablets. The Co she is working at is crazy and a health risk. Nothing has changed since the first time. It's not like she works for a different Co. Yes okay." He hung the phone up

## **round two - making a claim**

So I had to go through the whole thing again. The statements, the stress of waiting. I knew Theresa and Moira would turn on me, lying. I had to go again to the Insurance Psychiatrist and tell him the whole story.

I said to David, "How can it be another claim? It's the same Co and Joe hasn't kept a safe environment, and I am still on WorkCover." I felt very anxious but I knew I would not slip back. There was a difference from the first claim. I didn't shed a tear. I knew I was lucky to be out and also relieved.

The next morning the phone rang. "Hi Kathy, Theresa here. When are you coming back?" "I'm not Theresa. That place is crazy." Theresa said, "Can I put you through to talk to Joe or Hans?" "No I don't want to talk to them." Theresa replied, "Can I put you through and will you tell Joe that you will come back if he gets rid of Lucy? Tell him she is affecting you." I said, "No don't put me through." Theresa said, "Do you think I should go to the doctors too. I am stressed too?" "Yes go." Theresa said, "I need to document it. I'll ring you again"

I heard nothing from Joe. I knew he wouldn't ring.

When I was off the first time Priscilla told me that Joe was advised not to have contact with me but he rang a couple of times. What a hero. I made an appointment with Dr. McQueen the next day. I went into his office and told him what happened. He just looked at me. I remember he said, "You cannot buy loyalty, you cannot buy it." "Dr. McQueen, the insurance said that this would be another claim." He said, "How can it be another claim? You are already on WorkCover." I shrug my shoulders. "You tell me."

He wrote me out another WorkCover certificate and told me he was going away for a week but would leave his private number with the Receptionist and I was to ring him for any reason. I could tell he was worried about me but I was strong.

Theresa kept ringing me and I was careful what I said to her. I knew she was trying to get information out of me. What garbage she came out with. "I will stand up in Court and tell the whole story, you can depend on me."

I changed my phone number so she could not contact me. I posted in my certificate. As far as I calculated I should have had about ten weeks sick pay. Thursday came and no sick pay in my account. The Insurance sent a man out to my house for my statement. I had to tell all my personal information to a stranger, then more strangers read it. God knows what the other employees say about you when they

turn on you. I had no doubt about Theresa being one of those employees. It's so degrading trying to prove yourself ... and you're innocence.

The next week - still no sick pay. I refused to ring Joe or Hans to beg for money - they had taken enough of my dignity. I kept seeing Dr. McQueen and I began to send my certificates by certified mail. I didn't know why they were doing this. Then I received the first letter. They were asking me to resign. They wanted me off their books and were trying to force me to take my entitlements. A few days later I went to the supermarket and ran into John from programming. It seemed Theresa had been talking out of school. Apparently her brother-in-law worked for WorkCover and he had been in to see Joe and gave him advice on what to do. It seemed they were of the opinion that if I didn't resign they would have to pay me big money. 'How wonderful', I thought. 'If he really does work for WorkCover ... what hope do I have? Now even WorkCover is working against me.'

A few days later I received a letter from the Insurance Co. requesting that I go to see their Psychiatrist. I told him everything. I was suffering from anxiety, but still not slipping back. I knew I wouldn't. I kept sending my certificates to Lodown but still no sick pay. Dr. McQueen had written to the Insurance Co. asking their permission to send me to a Psychologist and they had agreed to pay.

David had made an appointment to see a Solicitor.

They read my statements and were appalled by Joe's conduct. The Solicitor advised us that they would no doubt knock back my claim. He said that the majority of people who are genuine stress cases drop the case. They know you cannot mentally go through the process and are not able to fight them. The Solicitor sent a letter to Lodown telling them to stop harassing me. Finally we received the letter from the Insurance Co. and sure enough, they had rejected my claim on a technicality.

So now I had to go through Conciliation. More stress and still no sick pay. David rang the Insurance. He was on the phone. "I want a copy of the statement from your psychiatrist. No, I don't want you to read it to me on the telephone. I am entitled to a copy." He kept talking. They didn't want to give it to us. He hung up and told me that our Psychiatrist could write and request it.

**So I had a doctor, three psychiatrists and now the Insurance psychiatrist saying it was all work-related and it meant nothing. Not a thing. We put in for Conciliation and were set a date.**

Not long after Lodown dropped the case for Alison, Cameron called me over to his work-table in the factory. He said

Kathy.

Yes Cameron.

I was in the bank last week and standing at the window. I could hear this lady next to me talking. She was asking about different accounts she could open which would give her the best interest rates. I thought to myself, 'Boy that lady is loaded'. I looked over and guess who it was ... Alison. She caught my eye and she calmly said 'Hello' to me. Not a worry in the world.

It's nothing but a joke Cameron.

I had no doubt that Trevor would have informed her about the case being dropped.

## conciliation

The morning began. I felt very nervous. It was not something I was looking forward too. We had to be there at 11.00am. David asked me how I was. "Not bad. I just wish it was all over."

We arrived at the building. I hoped Joe and Hans and Priscilla were not there yet. I went to the Reception. I couldn't talk. David asked the necessary questions. The lady told us to sit down and security would be with us soon. I was trying to hold back the tears. It was not working. I had asked for a separate room, as I couldn't bear to look into their eyes. They disgusted me.

David and I sat and waited. Silence. I just wanted to get into a room. The security guard arrived. "Your boss hasn't arrived yet. Just follow me and I'll take you into a room." He led us in and closed the door. "Are you alright?" he asked. "I'm fine." I knew he could tell I was upset but I felt safer. David and I sat at the table not saying much. I was still trying to hold back the tears. I thought, "I shouldn't have to go through this."

We were waiting for our WorkCover Representative.

The door opened and it was the Security Guard. He smiled and said: "Your boss has just arrived." He laughed. "You think you are bad. You should see your boss. He's in a terrible state." That didn't surprise me as I knew how Joe gets. He seemed so strong to look at but I've seen him fall apart before. The door opened again and a solid, middle-aged man walked in and introduced himself. "My name is Adrian Rank and I am your Conciliator." We all shook hands and he then sat down. "We will be conducting this Conciliation by intercom as you have requested separate rooms. I have met your boss and his Representative is Paul Garrett from S.E.M.I.A."

That took me by surprise as Hans and Priscilla had always accompanied Joe to any meetings or Court cases in the past. I cling onto the thought that just maybe they had a conscience, as they would be aware of what I had been through during the past three years. I knew Hans was a decent man. He was the only one apart from Priscilla to apologise to me when I came back to work after Ruby and Alison had left. He got up again. "Excuse me." He walked out of the room.

The door opened and it was our Representative. He smiled and said, "Good morning." Then sat at the opposite side of the table and began to get paperwork out of his bag. And said with a smile, "Your boss has put in a stress claim too." Nothing much surprised me. I knew Joe's attitude by now. I was sure that Joe thinks he was the victim.

The door opened again. It was the Conciliator. Behind him was another young man. He was a short guy. The Conciliator introduced him to us. "This is Peter - he is representing Pauls and Wilson". He

had jeans and an open t-shirt on. Not very professional looking. We shook hands and he left. The Conciliator began to speak over the intercom. "Can you hear me?" "Yes we can," says Peter.

Kathleen I will start with you.

I don't really know what to say ... My voice is shaky.

...Joe I have always thought the world of you. Yet you knew I was sick and you just refused to do anything. Everyone complained to you about Ruby and Alison. I told you I was off sick and you yelled at me. You told me to SHUT THE DOOR if the fighting was affecting me. You yelled at me when I told you I had a day off sick relating to WorkCover. Joe I nearly jumped off a balcony because of your negligence.

There was total silence. No one interrupted me. I continued.

You haven't paid a cent of my sick pay yet Ruby and Alison stole money from you and you still paid them their sick pay. And Joe, Lucy is getting sick because of Theresa ... do something about it. Theresa is causing so much trouble and Lucy is getting worse.

Still silence from the other end of the intercom. I know that they don't care. I'm their problem.

That's all I have to say.

The Conciliator addresses Joe.

Joe would you like to say something.

Joe begins.

Hello Kathy.

Hello Joe.

I run a large Co. I have always been happy with Kathy and we have always got on well. I often heard her laughing and joking. I would sit in my office at lunchtime and listen to everyone laughing. Sure I might lose it sometimes but I'M ONLY HUMAN (he says in a louder voice). I have been sick and getting tests done. I have had a lot on my mind.

David, myself and the Representative all looked at each other. I knew we are all thinking the same thing. "I thought this was about my health." The Conciliator gave no indication of what he was thinking. Then Joe said:

Hans was having a bad time with his marriage and he started to burn some Lavender. It had an affect on Kathy so I asked him to stop using it. I think. Yes I remember the event.

Once again we all looked at each other. Our Rep. was shaking his head. David rubbed his hand over his forehead. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Joe stopped talking.

The Conciliator listened with no expression. He said:

Would anyone else like to speak?

"Yes," says my Rep. "Joe there have been five stress claims against your Co. in stress certificates. Lucy is seeing a doctor and on antidepressants. The place is a mess. In Phillip's statement he says he was witness to you swearing the morning my client walked out."

Joe replied:

Yes, I may have lost it but the employee was drunk. Then once again. I'M ONLY HUMAN. That employee rings me every second day.

Our Rep. began again.

You have an employee by the name of Will Smiths?

Yes.

This man had a heart attack and you abused him for taking extra time off work. Correct?

Joe mumbled something. He wasn't expecting that one.

You admitted in your statement that you did say to Kathleen that you would lock the doors of the factory when she advised you that she was sick, correct?

Joe mumbled:

I I I I did.

My Rep continued.

You also told my client to shut the door if the fighting was affecting her.

Joe replied in such a caring tone.

Yes I told her to shut the door if it was affecting her.

He sounded so caring.

My Rep began to address the Insurance Rep. He said:

I have a copy of the Statement by your Psychiatrist.

And he began to read it out.

The claimant has experienced an exacerbation of a mixed anxiety/depressive disorder. This condition is a relapse of a pre-existing condition for which she is undergoing treatment and which is reportedly the subject of a worker's compensation claim. Employment significantly contributed to the current exacerbation by means of the claimant being upset about a supposedly inadequate pay increase.

The Insurance Rep said: "Section 82".

My Rep said:

My client walked out because of the conditions of this Co. Do you agree?

The Insurance Rep replied: "Section 82".

My Rep said:

Do you agree Peter, this is an exacerbation of a previous condition as quoted by your Doctor?

Once again he replied: "Section 82".

He said no more. My Rep continued to shake his head.

The Insurance Rep would not acknowledge my illness. The Conciliator began to talk.

Would anyone else like to say anything?

No response. He turned off the intercom.

I will be back.

And he walked out. The three of us were alone. Our Rep said:

They just refuse to accept it because of the clause.

A few minutes passed and the Conciliator returned. He sat down. Still no expression.

I have spoken to Joe and he wants you to go back and he will straighten everything up.

David spoke up.

She's not going back. This is the second time this has happened and it is still going on.

He looked at the Conciliator.

Would you put someone you loved into a situation where their life would be threatened?

He looked at David.

Fair enough.

The Conciliator continued.

The Insurance will not accept the claim and they have offered you the total amount of sick leave entitlement for the time off work Kathleen has taken in relation to her anxiety since October 23 2002. The employer has offered Kathleen her pro rata long service leave entitlements for ten years.

I think to my self, "I've been there eight and a half years."

WorkCover are willing to pay a further four weeks compensation in relation to her time off for the period in relation to her anxiety depression.

I was truly numb. The Conciliator looked at me and said:

Kathleen, if you think today was bad. Going to Court will make today seem like kindergarten.

My Rep spoke.

They will throw everything up at you at Court.

I knew that myself. I knew the lies that would come up. I would be on trial like a criminal protesting my innocence. My health would go down hill again. I couldn't stand up on the stand with a scar on my face or a limb missing. I turned to my Rep.

What about Compensation?

He looked at me.

You have to be thirty per cent incapacitated to go for Compensation.

I thought, 'thirty per cent incapacitated. How could anyone thirty per cent incapacitated go through a Court case?'

David had his arm around me. He said:

Anyone who is thirty per cent incapacitated would be in a padded cell.

I thought to myself, 'I nearly was.'

I turned to the Conciliator and said:

Who is going to take me on with two stress claims behind me?

I handed him a piece of paper.

Would you ask the Insurance if they will put me through a beauty course?

He replied:

I will put it to them on Monday and tell them you will drop the case if they pay for the course.

I hung my head still totally numb.

This is so unjust - so unjust. I would have been better off if I had stolen money too.

No one passed comment. They just looked. Then the Conciliator said:

I will ring you on Monday and let you know what they say. I'll let you know when your boss is out of the building.

We don't say much. He walked out and came back a few minutes later.

Your boss has left.

David held my hand and we walked out of the building with the Solicitor and shook hands and he left us. Strangely enough, I just accepted it. I guess I had to. I knew I was lucky to be out of that crazy environment and I treasured the mind I had. I knew nothing could be worse than what I had been through, and no amount of money in the world would compensate for my sanity. It was over.

Monday morning arrived. The phone rang. It was the Conciliator.

Kathleen its Adrian Rank. I have spoken to the Insurance and they are willing to pay half of the costs for the course.

"Yes," I say. "Would you approach Lodown and see if they will pay the other costs?"

He replied:

I have already asked them and they have already approached Joe but his reply was: "My premiums have gone up because of Kathy, so it is really my money that the Insurance is paying?"

I thought, 'Why doesn't that surprise me?' I had no feeling. I didn't even care anymore.

Okay Adrian tell them I will agree.

He said:

I will send out a statement for you to sign.

We hang up.

A few weeks pass and there was a knock at the door. It was Lucy.

“Hi Kathy.” “Hi Lucy, come in.” We start to talk. Lucy said, “I told Theresa I was going to see you and she said I better not as Joe would be angry. So I saw Joe and asked him if it would be okay. He said to me, “Of course it is.” She looked at me. “He said to say hello to you and said to me, ‘I really liked Kathy’.” I said nothing, just thought, ‘Even after all of this he still doesn’t get it.’ Then she handed me a folded piece of paper. I opened it up. It was a first letter of warning sent to Lucy because she was making mistakes. She said, “Phillip gave it to me so I fronted Joe as I didn’t think he knew anything about it. I said to him, ‘Joe I received a letter of warning. Did you know about it?’ He said, ‘Yes Lucy. I signed it but don’t worry love, you won’t be getting a second one’.”

As I look back now it all seems so unreal to me as if it was someone else. I am a different person now. I have learned a lot from this experience. The negative side is obvious but through it all I have come out a much stronger person. I have learnt so much about human behaviour. I am not so trusting and I think that is a good thing. Apart from the black side of my story, I have also many wonderful memories of the last three years. I know that I wasn’t the only one that suffered. I made some true friends because of the bond we all had. I have total peace in my mind and in my heart - and isn’t that what we all are searching for? I still use this water every day. Perhaps the answer to this peace is so simple and has been with us all these years. A gift that we have been given to use and never realized it. Or perhaps as they say, “Faith can move mountains.” Who knows?

I can’t wait to see Dr. McQueen and tell him. I arrive and he meets me at Rec. and walks me to his office. I sit down. He sits at his desk and looks at me. “How are you?” I look at him, smiling. “I’m not sick anymore.” “Sorry,” he says. “I’m not sick anymore.” He looks at me as I tell him what happened. He stares at me - studying everything I do and say. His eyes don’t leave me. I know he will see the difference, as I was so bad the last time I attended him. I finish telling him. I know he believes me, as I am so different. “Well I guess we should start decreasing you’re tablets.” “Yes I can do that Dr McQueen.” He smiles at me as I walk out. I’m so proud of myself.

## behind the scenes

About two weeks after I was off the second time, I wasn't receiving any sick pay and I did not want either David or myself to ring Joe. But I think that was the reason why they did not pay me. They wanted to force me to ring Joe. I heard he was in a state to get me back because of the information he received about paying out a large compensation. My daughter told me she would notify Joe that I would be off work for a while as I didn't want to inform them that I was not coming back. The whole thing is nothing but a cat and mouse game. So much bullshit.

She took a copy of the conversation so I'll tell you about it.

She rang Lodown at 10.27am, Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October.

She said that Joe sounded desperate. Advised him that Kath wouldn't be coming back to work at the moment. She is too upset at the moment. He should receive information from the doctor if he hasn't already.

His response:

He realises Kathy is fragile at the moment. She has never been a hassle. He has always tried to cater to her needs. He realises she has her good days and bad days. All he recalls is that she asked for a pay rise and he gave it to her. The next think he knew she spat the dummy. All she had to do was talk to him about it. He didn't know what had happened until someone came down and told him about it. They hadn't heard anything.

He is concerned, hopes she is feeling better.. They have always had a good relationship and he has never humiliated her IN HIS LIFE. There was an occasion where he was screaming at an employee but he was drunk and this was in his office. Kathy never said anything to him that it upset her.

There was a stage where there wasn't enough work and they were talking about redundancies. This didn't involve Kathy but she was there. The situation was sorted out though. He always thought that she was happy - you could always hear her laughing and joking. He is happy if she wants to come back to work but it is her decision. He received the information from the doctor and will send it into WorkCover and leave it in their hands. He thanked me for getting in contact with him.

## appendices

### appendix one: the holy water

I have a statement from Leanne. She used the Holy Water with the same result as myself but in a different way.

#### MY MIRACLE

My name is Leanne and I am thirty-two years old. I have three children and a husband and I am a very strong believer in the Holy Water. The Holy Water has changed my life in a way you would never believe.

I have had two healing experiences by the Holy Water.

I received the first healing from the Holy Water a few years ago. My life and my marriage - also my world - was at the end. I could not face these things anymore. I felt like I was in quicksand and people were holding my hand to help me out and then they would let me go. I felt like they were saying 'I will help you' and then saying, 'no stay there that is where you belong'. I could not go on with these feelings anymore. I was too sad.

I was given the Holy Water and told to spray it on me, my children, my husband, and the house. And ask for help. The way things were for me at that time was so bad. I didn't think the Holy Water was helping me until it happened. I released all my anger and my sadness. When this happened I was like a mad angry person going out of my mind. I was doing and saying things that were not me. I ended up crying for two days.

When I came out of this. I was good. I went on with the Holy Water for a little while and because things continued to get better I stopped using it. Well what I didn't know was I just started to get better. All my bad feelings were coming back. I was sadder than ever. People were hurting me so bad. I was thinking - if this is what life is all about I don't want to be here. This is when I was given the Holy Water again.

I started the Holy Water and about one to two weeks later I received my second healing. The second healing was so different than the first one. In the way I was not angry anymore. I received peace. My head became clear. I now know what I want. Where I need to go and also what I need. I will never ever leave my self open for people to hurt me. This does not make "me" a hurtful person. The person I

am now is a very clear minded person and I now know what I want. I am also able to help other people and also to love.

The Holy Water, I believe has helped me become a whole person. It has given me strength to face life, also strength to believe in myself, I know my own mind and I am not hiding anymore. I say now, "I am in this life and if people don't like it well too bad for them." All I want is to be happy. The Holy Water has not made my world perfect but it has given me a clear mind and strength so I can make my world just the way I want it. I will never stop using the Holy Water - it is a part of life for me. All I can say to you is if people are hurting you then you are letting them do it. Life is not long enough and everyone has the right for happiness.

## appendix two: peer support

My Sister-in-law.

I started to work at Lodown when I first met Kerryn. We got on well immediately. A few years passed and my health began to deteriorate, and strangely enough Kerryn had the same symptoms due to work-related issues.

She became very sick because of it. She had so much anger and hate in her. She carried it continually. We both declined in our health. We always tried to see the funny side of it. Two peas in a pod. We kept each other going. I could understand her strange behaviour. She would have anger attacks and say things that made no sense. Her doctor could not help her. Through it all we had such fun. We both knew how nutty we were, but it meant so much to me because I was able to have a friend who was trapped with me.

We would laugh at ourselves ... and many times hug and cry together, desperately clinging to each other for strength. David and I would go to their house in the country. We would be in the middle of a conversation between ourselves and I would forget what I was talking about. I would stop. "What was I talking about just then?" She would look at me with a blank expression. "I can't remember." We would laugh and laugh at ourselves. Then another conversation would start.

I would be telling her something, and I would forget what the name of something was and I would have to describe what it looked like "What do you call the things that keep up the curtains, or the thing you put on the bed?" By the time we had finished we were so bamboozled naming and describing things and never getting the right answer we would be doubled up laughing. It would have been even worse for me if I didn't have her. We both were given our health back.

### **appendix three: david's reflections**

Through all these years (the first six years) which eventually caused Kathy to leave on a WorkCover Stress claim and on returning to work for another three years after a short rehabilitation. I personally was concerned with my wife's health, not realising especially in the last three years how bad she was, as she handled her depression and anxiety by mostly hiding it from me and also fearing backlash from her boss if any stress or tension was mentioned.

On several occasions being her caring and loyal nature she would mention workplace concerns to her boss Joe with a very minimal response and even less positive action taken as to her concerns and well-being. I am trying to say that my concern first is and was my wife's life and sanity, and secondly the utter ignorance and tolerance of an unsatisfactory workplace environment. Management not knowing or not caring about a loyal employee and not being able to properly consult and solve this situation.

Luckily Kathy walked out of her employment with Lodown with her life. I would not let her go back to that situation a third time, as I did not want to lose her to a situation that will not change by a naive manager oblivious to other peoples feelings other than his own. I feel that we are lucky, even though it has cost Kathy her job. We can survive, but what if we were a couple with young children at home or school and not able to leave this stressful mismanaged workplace because of a desperate need for the income?

Does it need someone to die or have a mental breakdown because they are trapped in a situation and environment that they cannot change and management cannot perceive that they have a responsibility to remedy an unsafe workplace? WorkSafe is supposed to try to prevent accidents (mental and physical) in conjunction with employers and employees. WorkCover (Insurance) are there to help injured workers and rehabilitate the workers. There doesn't seem to be a great deal of communication between WORKSAFE and WORKCOVER(Insurance). Especially with rehabilitation and on going inspections of claims in the same workplace and with the same employee. Example: My wife after the first stress claim and having some rehabilitation and return to work with ongoing medical treatment was never periodically contacted by WorkSafe, WorkCover (Insurance) or Rehab., as to how she was feeling or how the workplace had been in the last three years. This cannot be ignorance - it has to be neglect. If I sound angry, it is anger, but more frustration, fear and total disappointment at my wife's payment (not money) for her loyalty to her employer.

## **appendix four: letters from Kathy**

### **the letter I wrote to Joe the day I walked out for good.**

Joe,

I would like you to know just what my life has been like because of you. I went through years of harassment and abuse and not only me. You were told and told the effect those women were having on your staff. Every time you did nothing and stood by them till finally after nights of crying and screaming I couldn't take any more. I finally cracked but you still stood by them even to the extent of asking me to leave of course for my own sake.

You even laughed when you read my diary. Your words were, "Hah, Ruby still screaming." I had years of torment. Then you offered Lucy a big salary to do a job which she didn't get to do and in Lucy's words, "Take it in appreciation for what you have done for us". Have you got any idea how I felt when I found out? You gave me a \$50.00 rise only because I found out. I have continually stood up for you when anyone criticized you for what you did.

I will tell you what I have been through. How my marriage survived I will never know. I lost my memory, my confidence was gone, nothing could register in my mind. I couldn't read anymore. I couldn't drive on freeways, or at night, in rain, or long distance. I had a continual black cloud like a wet blanket over my head and body. I cried continually and prayed continually.

I had people laughing at me, "Dumb," "Blonde," "No brains," so many things I hid from you. So many embarrassing times. But my worst days came about six months before I got better. For days I cried, continually drinking and trying to take an over-dose and end this life. The last time I was so close because by that time I was having terrible panic attacks - you could never know or begin to know what they were like.

I asked the girls not to let you know how bad I was because you would get upset with me. Only that I got better, believe me Joe, I would not be here today. You need to look at your Staff you have and pick out the loyal ones and treat them with a little more respect than you do. Have a look at the salary books in the main office and the difference in years put in by me. This is not a money situation. I have my dignity back once again and not you or anyone else will ever take that from me again.

*Footnote:*

I suppose people will read this and ask why I didn't leave. This sneaks on you so slowly, and by the time I considered wanting to leave I would not have a hope of learning another job, so you are really stuck.

The three earlier years were on a similar scale to those that followed. Ruby's weird behaviour - but Alison every now and then would pull her into line. Hans would come into the office and have a chat. I just tried to mind my own business and knew it would keep me out of trouble. I got on quite well with them.

It was my 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday. I walked up the stairs and my Reception had balloons all over it. Hans had helped to blow them up too. I didn't know Hans well at all. I was never sure of him. Later we got to know each other we got along very well. He has a heart. Anyway Joe rang me in the morning and told me that he had important Japanese visitors coming in ten minutes and to make sure everything was tidy. Of course I panicked. I went into Alison's office and told her and she started laughing. It was a set up.

We also went away on a bus trip to Leongatha. It was a good trip except for Alison keeping her husband in line and counting how many drinks he was having and rubbishing his mother in front of him.

## **letter to alison**

Hi Alison,

I need to talk to you. You have the responsibility to keep Ruby under control. She is affecting so many of the other staff. I know you like to use her for your benefit but perhaps you could show a bit of character – not only for me but everyone else - and do something.

You could start by practicing what you preach. You see so many faults in other people - why can't you see yourself? Start treating people with a little respect. You're so dominant. You continually suit yourself. What do you get out of it? Does it make you happy to know you hurt other people? Wouldn't it be better to just get along? So much energy you must use, for what? What have you achieved?

Don't you know you are losing the respect of all the employees? Does it make you happy the more you learn about the hate they feel? I know Ruby is bad news and I believe a coward. You pride yourself on

how strong you are. You are not frightened of anyone but consider this ...if Ruby didn't work here I bet you would be a better person.

Kath

*Footnote: I wrote this letter at Bronwyn's suggestion.*

*As you will see as you read - this woman would have to be the most dangerous person I have ever met in my life. This woman had no heart, no soul, and no conscience. In all the years I knew her I never once saw any care for anyone.*

*Bronwyn, you asked for words to describe her.*

*Dominant no conscience Liar Thief Cutting obsessive Creature of habit Thrived on arguments and scandal No heart Cannier Manipulator Loved to hear about someone's tragedy Believed her lies She would sit hour after hour on the phone complaining about someone delusion's of grandeur the list goes on and on*