

## A Crack in the Family Portrait

It started with a crack. Only a small one on the surface. But all cracks grow, until eventually an earthquake forms, and brings your entire world crashing down.

“Excuse me, Sir, sorry but you have to leave...We need to close the funeral home. I felt one last single, salty tear slide down my face. “Yes, yes of course.” I murmured as I grasped my walking stick and hoisted myself up.

“Take care, Sir. I’m sorry for your loss,” said the man, in a clearly fake sympathetic tone as he guided me out the door. He shut the door behind me. I lingered for a moment, resting my head against the door frame, until eventually I let out a soft sigh, as if giving in and accepting reality. I turned my back on the closed door, turning my back on my beloved, and attempted to swallow the lump in my throat. The first step was the hardest, but eventually I convinced myself to begin my journey back home, alone. As I walked down the dull, dirty streets, I contemplated my surroundings. The land which used to be rich and full of life was now littered with rubbish and the occasional used needle. There was no wildlife to be seen. No nature. Only the depressing, dull grey tone of manmade infrastructure which has corrupted the land. A pack of youth approached, stumbling and swearing loudly. “Got a ciggy to spare?” I noticed the overwhelming stench of booze on his breath, and shook my head while glaring at him with disgrace. This incident would never happen in my day. Yet then as they turned to walk away, I remembered years earlier, when my own son was just like them.

I reached into my pocket for the old key chain. It used to be rich with keys, chiming everywhere I went, but they appear to have gone missing over time, or become no longer necessary. Now there was only one, single, lonesome key. The key to the old house haunted with memories from the past. I once thought they were happy memories, but now I’m not so sure.

Walking down the hallway was like going back in time. Except the photographs were faded, and the people staring back from them were no longer around. The most tear jerking of them all was positioned above the mantel piece, in a golden frame; the old family portrait from years ago. Our faces frozen in time. A happier time. But even then we were not as happy as the photograph suggests. Tim’s vibrant, neat red hair draws the most attention in the photograph. My arm is around his shoulders, he is smiling up at me, with his teeth glistening like the stars we used to watch together. He was so young. So innocent. But this didn’t last long, our father-son star gazing time slowly decreased, then there was his first crime. It was only a minor one then, not like his most recent, but even so, at the time it seemed far too unbelievable seeing our little boy in hand cuffs.

“Dad, it wasn’t my fault ok! Someone must have put the drugs in my bag, it wasn’t me... Just get me out of here.”

“You missed your Mothers funeral, Tim...”

“DAD! Please just get me out of here”

When Tim moved out, it was just Susan and I. Although she was my soul mate, we had grown distant over the years. We loved each other but did not show it. So many regrets.

When I think back to all the things I should have done, it makes me despise myself. As we aged, we both seemed to shrivel up. Her cheeks which used to be soft and rosy turned dull and saggy, as if they were deprived from the kisses I used to plant on them. It makes me feel like I killed her.

As Susan's memory started to fade, I showed her less and less affection. It wasn't a conscious decision, it was just difficult. I know realise that as her memory drifted further and further away, it became more important for her to be reminded of my love for her. But I was too distracted with pointless attempts at keeping Tim out of trouble.

Two days before the end, I talked Tim into coming over for dinner. I thought it might help Susan, bring her back to reality, but when Tim walked through the door, she stepped back. "Who is that?" she asked whilst grasping my arm firmly. She was afraid, which made me afraid. Tim tried to convince her he was her son, but this just made her more and more hysterical. So I told Tim to leave. Perhaps that was why he did it. The next morning I got the call which made my blood go cold. Drug smuggling. How could he be so stupid? So I set out to try and rescue him, but there was really no point, there was nothing I could do.

When I got to the airport, I received a call with even worse news than the last. It was our neighbour. She hesitated, not knowing how exactly to put the horrid news which would bring my life to a complete halt. She explained in a grim tone how she went to check on Susan like I had asked, and found her on lying on the couch, cold. Every bit of life absent from her body. She had left the gas on. If I had of been there we still would have be together.

Tim was found guilty, and was sentenced to 20 years in jail. I am 82 now; I will never see him out of jail again. I looked back at the family portrait. One day we seemed to have everything. I looked closely at the photo, there appeared to be a crease I had never noticed. A crack in the perfect family picture. That must have been where it started.

## Explanatory Statement

'A Crack in the Family Portrait' is a narrative written in response to Bruce Dawes poetry. The purpose of my piece is to explore the dangers of belonging to the mainstream Australian society. It would be published in a collection of student writing for students studying identity and belonging.

I included clear links to a number of Bruce Dawes poems in my narrative, as well as adapting some of his writing techniques. I stole aspects of 'Planning a time capsule' when describing the land "littered with rubbish and the occasional used needle." From there I continued to describe how Australia is changing for the worse, which is another key idea present in Dawes poetry. I used the "depressing dull grey tone of manmade infrastructure" as symbolism reflecting the protagonist's own mood. From this I moved on to the idea of how destructive and inappropriate today's youth can be, with this I linked to 'The Boy' which turns out to be my protagonist's son.

I used symbolism in my third paragraph when describing how the keychain which "used to be rich with keys" now had "only one, single, lonesome key." The key symbolises the protagonist, because although he has had a typical mainstream family life, now he is all alone and suffering.

In my fourth paragraph, I used a simile to express how "walking down the hallway was like going back in time." When describing the family portrait and how it is "positioned above the mantel piece, in a golden frame" I used imagery to express that this particular photo was an extremely prized possession, which they put up on a pedestal. I made clear link to the prompt when explaining that even then they were "not as happy as the photograph suggests." Here I am providing a clear message about how even when you appear to have everything, suffering can still occur. I then linked back to 'The Boy' making it obvious that Tim is the character with "neat red hair" from Bruce Dawes poem.

As well as linking to 'The Boy', I also linked to 'Enter Without so much as Knocking' by using the star gazing motif which is present in many of Dawes poems. I did this while also using a metaphor: "his teeth glistening like the stars we used to watch together." From this I stated that their "father-son star gazing time slowly decreased, then there was his first crime." I did this with the intention of showing where things in their apparent perfect life began to go wrong. I then jumped back to the present where Tim and his father are discussing his recent drug smuggling crime, and how it caused him to miss his mother's funeral. The purpose of this was to emphasise how deep the "cracks" in their family life was.

I then went into further detail about the protagonist and his wife's life, and where it started going wrong. I used the metaphor of how the lack of kisses on Susan's cheeks caused them to become "dull and saggy". With this I provided a link to 'Mementoes', using the idea of

regretting not showing enough affection, and the prospect of loving someone but not showing it.

When Tim comes over for dinner, and Susan does not recognise him, this is not only a result from her Dementia, but also as a result from how much he has changed. He went from being an innocent young boy who flashed a badge of rebellion to fit in, changing into a criminal who resembles nothing like the boy he used to be. This linked to a number of Dawes poems including 'The flashing of Badges' as well as 'Enter without so much as knocking'.

The ending of my narrative links back to the prompt, expressing that although he once appears to have everything, he is now a "single lonesome key". I also linked back to the photograph motif where the protagonist notices a crease in the family portrait. This crease symbolises where things went wrong, and that although they appeared to be happy, their life was not perfect. They suffered even though they belonged to the typical mainstream Australian society. This is why I chose to title my narrative 'A Crack in the Family Portrait', to symbolise the crack in their lives as well as foreshadow the story.