

# “Father and Son”

by Michael and Trevor<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael and Trevor both chose to use their real first names in this story.

<sup>2</sup> Artwork by Dale Scoles

## **Father's Perspective**

I think to myself, if only he can say what happened. I've always believed that he would be happier. But he is happy.

Annabel and I were very young when we had Michael. He was born in Dunedin in 1968. When Michael was born, the doctor said his heart went a bit wonky but he was alright. We didn't think much of that and I guess at about 6-7 months old, when babies start sitting up and doing those sorts of things, he wasn't doing it. Eventually, we went to see Professor H. I remember him saying, he seemed to think that I was very upset about all of this and I wasn't but I remember

he said to me, "how do you think Michael is going to be in his life"? I said "if Michael wants to fly a plane he will, it will just take him a bit longer to learn it". And he came right up to me, right into my face and said "Michael will never fly a plane". I ignored that. I was only 20 years old but I was thinking, "don't tell me my son won't fly a plane".

Michael was a loveable boy. We wanted him to start school at the age of five but they wouldn't allow it so he started school at age six. When the year finished, they told us they don't have the staff there to support him. So he went through a special class in George St school. He got a taxi to school, funded by the government which we

were very grateful for. Michael went to George St School until he went to Maryland's School at the age of 10. Why did we send Michael there? I was thinking about that this morning.

In between, Michael's behavior, like he used to hit Lisa a wee bit. I had bad depression too from what happened to me all those years ago. Jack Austin was the psychologist, I remember that. So, I had all this depression and he thought it was better for the family that Michael go to Maryland's School. Jack Austin said that he would fix it all up and he did. They told us that the school would be excellent for Michael, for learning and it was. Like he was great with

money. He was great at spending it too. He can be a miser though. He could have \$50.00 in his pocket but if you owed him \$2, he'd want it. So that way, he's very articulate when he speaks sometimes. He has grown this ability to communicate and talk. Sense of humour. What a sense of humour. And I remember hating the idea but I do remember thinking it's a relief. We were excited too but then Michael had to leave. The reality of it was huge. And Lisa sometimes was at the wrong end of Michael - he would sometimes hit her. Although he loved her. But the person that was most upset was Lisa. So it was a funny time. I remember my father, he is an amputee. He had his leg off when he was

seven years old. So he knew a bit and I remember him saying to us, no don't send him there. You're putting a label on him. I'll always remember that.

Michael was taken to Marylands and the first time we all went up he was in a play. Mid-term we'd all go and stay up there for a weekend in a motel. They were doing a play in the mall of Christchurch. And Michael was an Angel. And this little kid, well he was 10, maybe 11, singing. He sang like a bird and he was an Angel in this play. But the brothers never made themselves known. And when we went up there for weekends it was the cook we saw, mostly. I used to draw pictures of Fred Dagg

and all that and I used to always draw that with the letters. And I've never seen evidence of one of those letters yet and there were heaps of them. And he didn't know what I was talking about when I told him.

I remember one time when we got there, I was early. I went to the school early and they were playing cricket. Michael was a great bowler. We used to play in the back yard from the age of about four. And he used to bowl me out. I watched for a while and Michael came into bowl. And all of a sudden, this is toward the end of Michael's stay there, it's just something, and he bowled, he bowled this boy out. And then the boy picked up the bat and started

chasing Michael. Running after him. Michael saw me on the bank and said what will I do Dad. I said, just turn around and flatten him. And he did. Well not right there but he ran around the back of the wicket and he flattened him. He had to. And this teacher came running over and grabbed Michael by the hair and pulled him off and said "hey, I've told you you've got to be very easy with this boy". Like this is the boy with the bat. What hurt so much about that was, I didn't do anything. And later on I was having tea with the boys and this teacher came over and said "I'm sorry about that". I said, it's ok but it wasn't ok. It stayed with me. I should have told him to bugger off, you know I was so angry.

The ladies that did the meals and the staff that looked after the boys, they were wonderful people. They were, truly. Michael continued playing the guitar up there and a little Māori boy, a nice lad he was, him and Michael seemed to get on. So they played the guitar together but I don't think it was celebrated much. The lack of..... you know these brothers, where were they? And of course there is a feeling of guilt, we sent him there you know. If Michael hadn't have gone there, he might not be as educated, but he wouldn't have black memories. We went up there once and he was in confinement, we couldn't see him. I asked them why, what had he done

and they told us he had pinched the night watchman's lunch.

In the school holidays, Michael always flew home and sometimes he'd have the captain's hat on. They were wonderful, those people. But going back, he never wanted to go back. He'd run away. I chased him all through town one time. Annabel worked at a shop and I was taking Michael to the airport and we called in to see Annabel and he took off. They're some really painful memories. I went up there on a train one time and I remember Michael wanting to come back with me but I couldn't take him. Probably the last year or so it didn't matter so much. The last couple of years. In the

last few years Mike became aloof - not so welcoming, withdrawn, Marylands had become his home. I thought he had a wee weight on his mind.

I remember Michael's final day there. They had this wee thing. There was more than one boy. Two boys I think, maybe the wee Māori boy. And the principal of the school, I think she was the principal and there was a brother there too, that woman was crying. She broke down and cried. And I thought this is odd. She wasn't crying like she was just going to miss the boys. She was breaking her heart. God I'd love to have a word with her now. What did she see?

Michael was 16 years of age when he finished at Marylands. When he came home it took him a while to settle. His personal hygiene was a problem, washing hands, he hated having a shower. Different now though, he showers everyday. We got him into some training centre down Anzac Avenue there and the hours, everything about it, I thought this is going to be hard for him. He hated it. Used to run away. And that's probably when he first started riding the buses. He had a monthly bus pass. He knew all the bus drivers and they all knew him. Outside our house, there was no bus stop there but they'd all pull up there to let Michael off. And then we got in with the other IHC. Michael worked

with them pulling starter motors to bits and all sorts of things which is fair enough. I'd probably enjoy doing that myself. But once again riding the busses, you know. Then he got gardening through the IHC which he liked but then he got pulled off that. in the finish, IHC did a good thing. There was a recycling company starting up and IHC had a contract with them. And part of the contract was that they sent two young men to help and so when the contract finished about a year later, the recycling wanted to keep Michael. So they did. And man those guys were great. And they taught him how to work and what it's all about. They taught him.

He had a girlfriend. I remember coming home one day and Michael, I suppose he was about 20 or so, so that would have made me 40. And Annabel said to me, go through to the lounge, Michael is here with his girlfriend. And she was about 60 [laughs]. It was a shock that she was older than me. But I don't know what happened to her. He had another girl that was in a wheelchair for quite a long time. And they're still friends but this girl, I knew her family and that too. Whenever she has a birthday party, I go around there and play the guitar and I ask Michael if he wants to come but he always says "I'll see Dad". Then later I'd say, "oh you weren't there." And he'd say "no, if I go there

she will start ringing me up every day." So relationships are ruined. He doesn't know. And I don't think that's the brain damage. Because I have seen how people with...mind you, we're not all the same. But I've seen intellectually disabled can still love someone. And I think [for] Michael, that's all affected.

While Michael was going through these services, there had been a few comments made about Michael and his behavior. A staff member had said something about sexual things, I think it was to [his girlfriend]. Michael saw a Psychologist leading on from all that. She told us she believed it was likely something had happened to

Michael but she didn't get explicit about anything. She dealt with Michael; she didn't need to consult us about everything because he was an adult. But if there was anything then, there is nothing now. There are no reports of Michael being like that. You get a fear that that sort of thing might happen. Especially, Michael loves children and they love him. He is wonderful with kids, especially little babies. And he always has, right from a little kid himself. You know, if a lot of bad happens, how much good does it take to get rid of it? Well it's not that much anyway, could be about that much. Good has such a big effect.

A friend of mine had a lot to do with all the brothers getting charged. Her son committed suicide. And he was dressed as a woman and he was married as well. You know, they screwed him up. I know when I saw that brother McGrath on TV, I wasn't surprised. There is another guy that worked for the [community service]. And he was a counsellor of some sort. And Michael told me one day, he had been at an interview with this counsellor who had been had up for interfering with clients. When I made enquiries about it they said "oh no". So we're talking about how nobody is up front about these things and as for hearing about Brother McGrath, I think I knew. When he was on TV, that was

when he was charged, or put into jail for a few years.

I can't remember if we were contacted, or if we had to enquire, but we had the interviews. First of all, it was the brothers in Australia. And a psychologist was with them. It's so unbelievable really because Michael denied everything. And they said, well we will send photo's over of where the molestation took place and see if that can remind Michael. They never did. But part of this was the police wanting interviews as well. And they interviewed Michael and me together. But no, he couldn't remember. And then they interviewed Michael on his own. But once again they left things, like the brothers saying we will send

photos and then never did. But I think I was pleased to get out of there myself.

Poor Michael. The threats and things, it can cut such a deep groove in people. My friend, I mentioned her before, she said to me that these boys were threatened. And you can imagine, they all had intellectual disabilities for a start and it wouldn't be hard. The brothers would know what to say. So they become beliefs and they take them on as beliefs and they stay there. I know Michael has a memory like an elephant.

Michael used to go to church with me and I played guitar in church. Michael was an altar boy, And he actually received communion off the pope so

this was after Marylands of course. So he saw the pope in 84, he had finished school by that time and he received communion off the pope as one of the representatives for the disabled.....I hate that word. Disabled or abled. So, church was big. I started taking Michael to church when he was just a wee fellow. I've always had a firm belief in God and I still do but I don't necessarily believe in the manmade rules. Especially around what you hear and see. But you can't blame God for everything. And I remember when it all came out, first the brothers were cheating people. People were blaming the church and it's true. Cover ups and no thought of the victims or anything like that. I think what

it's put me off, It's put me off Church but it hasn't put me off belief. And sometimes you go through the motions. Fortunately for me playing music, that's a huge aspect of my faith. That's how I got by and are still getting by.

Michael with music, it's done so much for him. He wanted to learn that guitar. We've all got gifts. I remember he was playing down Gold Guitars one year and the stage manager was a chap about my age I suppose and I was out the back looking through at Michael on the stage and this old guy was standing there and the tears started flowing out of his eyes. I understand where he's coming from. He said, "is he your boy? He's incredible".

He's a great pool player too. The only thing he did win at the school was a cup for champion pool player. He likes doing things that he wants to do. He doesn't, like if I just said "come on Mike, we'll go for a walk." He'd say he'd have things to do. He's very independent and self-determined.

I remember one time, this is quite a few years ago. I was half asleep and half awake and I was saying this eulogy and it was all about Michael. And how much Annabel, Lisa and I had given to Michael. Then all of a sudden of how much he had given us. And it filled the room. It was massive. I tell you what, this was so real. He got breakfast in bed for about a week. I've

never forgotten that. It was just so real. Michael and I have a wonderful relationship, I know I've done a lot for Michael, and he's done a lot for me.

I know I've had something happen to me in my life. I've lived with it all my life and one day, I talked about it and man, it was like a weight coming off my shoulders because I talked about it. You know, that's my experience. You might walk out of here today feeling great because you have talked. But sometimes with things that are so hard to talk about, once you start talking about them it just starts rolling out.

## **Son's Perspective**

When I went to Marylands, I was a bit nervous at the start but then after a wee while, I think I got used to it. Mum and dad came up and visited me, but it was hard leaving, saying goodbye to them. I think I wanted to come home but I couldn't. I had friends there. I have a friend who I live with now who went to Marylands.

I played soccer there and I worked in Laundry. Nice staff worked there, they always said "Hello, Michael". I had a nice teacher, all teachers were nice but I just had one that was nice. She was good to get along with. One teacher wasn't great with me. Like if I said I was a bit upset

with something she would just ignore me and everything. But this other teacher, if I had a problem, would give me 10 minutes and ask if I wanted to talk. Having people around who listen to you and help with problems is important. Staff were nice. Food was beautiful.

One time when it was lunchtime at one of the villas I was in, they gave me eggs and I'm allergic to eggs, and I was sick. I spewed up and everything and the staff made me clean it up. I had to do it then dad walked in the door and he said "what are you doing, Michael?" and I said "we've just had eggs for lunch." Dad said to the staff, "did you read Michaels notes? He's allergic to eggs".

Dad told them to look at my folder, they did then they stopped me and told me they didn't know I was allergic to eggs then they cleaned it up. Next day we had eggs again but they gave me something else, Baked beans I think.

Beach house was good. You had to be selected to go. I think I was one of the lucky ones that got selected to go. Dad, remember I went abseiling? It was scary and when I got to the bottom I said "can I go again?". The brothers were there. I went about four or five times. I think I was made to go the second or third time but after that I wanted to go again. We did a play and I was a Dove.

[Michael is asked if there are things that he had to do that he did not want to do].

Yeah. I can't think of what ones they were.

[Were there things that they asked you to do that made you feel uncomfortable?]

Yeah, I think there were some but I can't think of what they were.

*[Do you feel comfortable talking about what happened to you?]* I don't feel like talking about that part.

I didn't like going to Church. I can't remember what happened at church. *[Dad asks "what would happen if you didn't go?"]* "Can we stop that now please?" *[Michael's tone is urgent and pleading]*.

*[Dad tells Michael that Brother McGrath is in prison for 30 years]*. Good. Throw the key away, or get someone to do the same thing to him and see how he likes it. That might wake his ideas up. This is not good what I have done, I'm getting it done to me.

I was happy at that school. I enjoyed my time there. It was sad leaving Mum & Dad but good times when they visited me or when I visited them. It was hard to leave to go back to school. When I left Marylands, I wanted to go back.

I feel good about life. I play Futsal and Petanque. I love playing music, guitar and

singing. I have a job that I like. A good life is to have fun things that you want to do. And having people who help with your problems. I have got my staff where I am and all I need to do is say I need to talk and they might say to me “give me 5 minutes Mike” or 20 minutes and as soon as they are done they will be free to talk if I have got a problem or anything. I feel supported.