

synopsis of “Made To Be Broken” an autobiography by Caroline Ambrus



I always wanted to be an artist as long as I can remember, but my father had other ideas. The denial of my ambition left me inconsolable, so I filled the emptiness by failing at everything else. I had drifted into deep waters.

Part 1 Early disadvantage

My story examines how I was transformed from a confident, outgoing little girl into a woman who obeyed her father, pleased her husband, placated her mother and sacrificed her own well-being for other people, especially men. As a child I was gradually disappeared into the silence of a non-person, stripped of love, dreams, plans, self-respect, self-esteem and direction. I could not speak for

myself as the words had been taken from me at a young age. I had to stop pleasing everybody and love myself. I had to create barriers against harmful people to keep myself safe. It took a long time and there were periods of regression back to my damaged self. But my record as an artist and a writer is evidence that I emerged from the patriarchal constraints which have haunted me and limited my creativity for so long.

My parents subscribed to Calvinistic beliefs that God was sovereign, humankind was depraved and predestination ruled. As a teenager I was able to dispense with God and I found depravity interesting. However, I discovered that predestination was not divine. It was a process for turning humans into fodder for the “social good” which was based on the subjugation of women. Every man, from the rich and powerful to the humiliated men of the working class, was entitled to their share of every woman’s body. The 1950s put the cause of women’s autonomy back for decades. Rape, uncontrolled fertility, unwanted children and backyard abortions were rife. Many marriages had three marching to the alter, the bride in white with the foetus carefully concealed in the folds of the wedding gown, and the groom. The horror of illegitimate birth and unmarried motherhood was the nightmare of every girl. The regulation women’s sexuality was, and still is, the lynch-pin for controlling them in every other way.

My father was the only son of an only son. The family name was in danger of disappearing unless my father produced males. I was the first born and to my parent’s dismay, I turned out to be a girl. After that, at regular intervals my mother produced sons, four of them. As a child I was made aware that males had more value than females. My brothers stuck together, a bond which insulated them from our parents indifference to our existence and also addressed the issue of their sister as I was older, bigger and probably smarter than them at the time. We didn’t communicate and I became the outsider at an early age.

We were fed and housed but what we needed most was love which neither parent was able to give. My mother was often sick, often pregnant and often out socialising. She had no energy for her children. We were usually left unsupervised at home and we wandered around the town at our whim. My mother was a cold woman with a waspish disposition and my father was as remote as God. Communication with their children was short sharp instructions like “eat your dinner” or “you wait until your father gets home”, in which case a belting was the outcome. There were no explanations, commiserations or salutations between my parents and their five children.

Compounding my family’s sterile regime, my father, who was a teacher, was regularly moved from one posting to another. When I was ten I was torn from my beloved home town, from my friends and from my school to face a bleak future at a run down city school. I grieved and when the grief subsided, I tried to

reinvent myself. But I had no roots in my new environment, so I was unsuccessful. Help was not forthcoming from anyone. Then three years later there was another move. Again I tried to reinvent myself and again there was no help. My parents were unaware that these moves unhinged their children every time. We were left to cope as best as we could.

Then came my teenage years in the 1950's. The sexism of the time was so bad that in the 1970s women rebelled and launched a movement which changed the world. After being moved twice during my critical school years, I ended up academically, emotionally and socially drained. I survived the Leaving Certificate with modest passes in all subjects. The question of my future loomed ominously. I timidly asked my parents I could study art. My father refused on the basis that art schools were places of moral degeneration and art was not a suitable occupation for a well brought up girl. With a few words my father destroyed my dream of becoming an artist. I was sent to teacher's college which I failed and was expelled. Then I did a stint as a psychiatric nurse. After a lack lustre performance, I either left or got fired, I can't remember which.

Whilst I was nursing, I met a man at a club the nurses frequented. He was older than me and very charming. I was flattered. He listened to me, he complimented me, he showered gifts on me and in no time we, or rather I, fell in love. For the first time in my loveless life there was somebody who thought I was special. We very soon became a couple with all that implied, especially sex. I was naive. It was a honey laced trap.

Meanwhile my mother's health went from bad to worse and she ended up in hospital weighing a mere six stone or so. There was no discernible cause. Seeing I was jobless, my father insisted that I come home and care for the family. He offered me a mere pittance in comparison to the wages I received nursing. He was mean to the core. Being a well-trained dutiful daughter, I complied. I left the city and returned to my parent's home with my boyfriend tagging along behind. At least he came armed with gifts which was a suitcase full of bananas and a white coat I had put on lay by.

Part 2 Becoming a woman

In the beginning my parents accepted my boyfriend. He used to sleep over in the spare room, sometimes leaving the next day to go to his job in the mountains. One time when my parents were out of town, my boyfriend arrived unexpectedly and stayed the night. He was observed by a neighbour leaving the house early the next morning on his way to work. After that I was in trouble for allowing him to stay when my parents weren't at home. I don't remember them imposing any such restriction, but they may have.



The path to becoming a woman was dangerous in the 1950s. They had to negotiate conflicting social and sexual demands. Any failure was punishable by torture which was inflicted by men against deviant women.

By now I was pregnant. I was confident that a quick marriage would be arranged. This was in spite of my father warning me that if I became pregnant not to expect their permission to marry. I think my father forgot which century he was living in. When I phoned my boyfriend with the news, he belatedly informed me that he already had a wife and a child and that we could not marry until he got a divorce. He then followed this up with a letter explaining the situation.

A few days later he came to see me and we met in town. There were things we had to discuss. He drove me back to my parent's place. Nobody was home and the house was locked. Houses in that town were never locked. I was angry and wanted to leave town immediately. I realised that if my pregnancy became common knowledge then I was in for a shitty time. So without picking up any of my things, including my boyfriend's letters, I left on my home, my parents, my brothers and my job at the local bank. I just wanted to have some space to work out what to do and I could not do that with the spectre of parental interference.

Halfway back to Sydney, my boyfriend rang my father and informed him we had left. My father threatened that unless we returned immediately, he would call the police and my boyfriend would be charged with the abduction of a minor. I was seventeen at the time, hardly a minor. So we returned under a cloud.

My father was waiting in the family room and my mother was in bed. My father demanded that if I considered myself a family member then my penance was to spend several days in my bedroom, my boyfriend was to leave immediately and there would be no contact. There was no discussion which was the usual way my tyrannical father dealt with matters. I more or less said “OK, I’m off, goodbye” and we left again.

We ended up at the Snowy and I was staying with my boyfriend’s friends. I felt safe with them as they were caring people and they looked after me. In my absence, my parents had trawled through my bedroom. They found the letters about my boyfriend’s marital status and my pregnancy. Meanwhile I spent a few peaceful weeks watching the snow come and go. Then one day my boyfriend showed up with a black eye. My parents had come to the Snowy to see us. They demanded to know where I was but he refused to tell them. Insults were exchanged and my mother punched him in the face, her wedding and engagement ring catching him in the eye.

A couple of weeks after my parent’s visit, my father appeared at the house where I was sheltering. He told me that they knew I was pregnant and wanted to talk things over with me. He asked me to come with him to the local shop where my boyfriend was waiting and I agreed. I didn’t ask questions. I was confident that my boyfriend would protect me. It was evening and the shop was closed. Everything was dark and nobody was around. I got out of the vehicle and greeted my boyfriend who was standing under the street light. He came forward, looking very sad as he held me in his arms. In an instant my father and his friend tore me away from him and pushed me into the back of the van. I had been kidnapped. The whole thing had been a set up from start to finish.

In retrospect this is what happened. My parent’s earlier visit to my boyfriend left them angry and frustrated. They didn’t get what they came for. So they went back home and cooked up a scheme with their male friend. Some days later my parents returned in his van with the intention of forcing me to return to their house. I later learned that the friend came equipped with a gun and my father came equipped with moral indignation and a threat to have my boyfriend deported. This would have had a frightening impact on him, as he had much to hide. That night my parents and their friend committed crimes against me and my boyfriend. That night they destroyed the person I was trying to be. My self esteem and confidence was finally shattered. I have never recovered the full extent of my creativity. Maybe I got some of it back. It’s hard to know.

In kidnapping me, my father demonstrated to my brothers and to the people in that small country town that he was a strong man who would not tolerate insubordination from any woman, or a challenge from any man. It was medieval in the best Christian tradition. My father was a prominent citizen so everybody

was taking notice. I deserved privacy and what I got was an announcement of my pregnancy to a married man which was broadcast all over town.

My four brothers whose ages ranged from fifteen down to four years of age were also taking notice. At this early stage of their lives they learned from their father, that their sister was a fallen woman, and an object of public shame, ridicule and humiliation. This was to have a damaging effect on my relationship to them for the rest of our lives. What my father had done to me was take me from a place where I was safe, to a place of risk which was tarnished with protestantism. There was danger for me and my baby to come. I knew I was smart enough to figure out what to do, but my father's violent, paternalistic behaviour left me weakened and vulnerable so that my way of dealing with problems was reaction rather than action. I drifted aimlessly through the turbulent current of my early adult years.

In the game of sibling rivalry, my brothers definitely had the upper hand. Not only was I the older sister, but I also belonged to that despised alien species of the 1950's, a female. My vulnerable situation confirmed to them that man was superior to woman, that their father was superior to their mother and that they were superior to their sister. My descent into perceived sexual depravity, which was evidenced by getting pregnant, would have confirmed this hierarchical structure of society from which they derived status, opportunities and their own personal female slaves. They grew up and married nice girls, having skirted around premarital sex, shotgun weddings, premature babies and getting caught doing it.

Over the six or so weeks of my incarceration in my parent's house, my parents used every trick in the book to compel me to "have it adopted" interspersed with "we have to protect our sons" and "what are the neighbours going to say?" My parents forgot that by forcing me to return they made sure the whole town was on notice and waiting for me to hit the streets with my belly hanging out. To avoid this, their plan was to send me to a church home for unmarried mothers to do a stint of hard labour until the baby was born, knowing that upon its birth it would be snatched away and adopted without my permission. This unlawful act is a national scandal to this day and my parents were potential collaborators. They totally ignored that my boyfriend was there for me and that we planned to live as a defacto couple. To my parents "defacto" was a dirty word and a scandalous deed.

I was rescued from my parents' toxic ministrations by an aunt and I was reunited with my boyfriend. We became the defacto couple of my parent's nightmares. I was nearly free of them. But before I was emancipated from my paternal executioner, my father had one more tactic up his sleeve. He decided to have my brain waves examined in case I was irredeemably mad, which was a traditional way of controlling rebellious females.

My father referred me to a Macquarie Street psychiatrist with the

instruction to determine if I was insane. His words to me were in effect, “if the psychiatrist finds you sane, you are on your own. If you are found to be insane you will remain my responsibility,” which was a version of damned if I was and damned if I wasn’t. Even the act of referring me to a psychiatrist damaged my credibility. After a barrage of tests, the psychiatrist said, in so many words, “crikey, you have an I.Q. of 155 [more or less], you need to piss off your parents and get a life.” I wish I had taken his advice. I remained tied to the frayed umbilical cord of my parents’ every conservative nuance.



The woman in this image has unmasked and decapitated the false knight in shining amour. The baby is waiting. The cut flowers represent the death of the woman's hopes and plans.

Part 3 The first breakup

Then my daughter was born. Soon after that my boyfriend, by now my defacto husband, had turned from being an attentive, generous lover into a text book spousal abuser. It was to start off slowly and then escalated into full blown reign of terror some years later. The honeymoon was well and truly over. My defacto's history at this point is informative. He was a post World War Two immigrant to Australia. He arrived with his wife who was German. His ethnic origins was Hungarian and when World War Two arrived in Hungary his father decided that his youngest son, who was apparently useless, may as well volunteer to the Woffen SS, which was a division of the German army. I know this is true as I saw the scar under his arm where the official tattoo with blood type his information had been removed.

According to his accounts, he deserted the German army which meant a sentence of death. Further, as a volunteer to the Woffen SS, if he got caught he would have been executed by the allies. So under this double sentence of death, he lied his way into Australia with his wife. When I met him, his marriage had broken down and he was on the loose with a declared intention to have as many children as possible to help repopulate Australia. Poor silly me. I had tied my life to a psychopath and I didn't realise it.

We left the Snowy and came to Canberra. My defacto got a job in a government workshop and, because he worked for the Government, we were allocated a prefab cottage at Narrabundah. There we began our life as a presumed married couple. There was never enough money so food was in short supply. Twelve months after the birth of my daughter, I had a son. And then I got pregnant again shortly after. We found a doctor who would do the abortion cheaply and without killing me with sepsis or blood loss.

My relationship with my defacto was not great. I was very fragile and suffered panic attacks. My weight was down to under seven stone. He used to laugh at me and told everybody that he had to shake the bedclothes to find me. Then, instead of caring for me, he began an affair with my best friend. I had visited my parents up North, leaving the two children with him and my girlfriend. I guess I still had some hope that my relationship with my parents could be improved.

On my way back to Canberra, my defacto, the girlfriend and the children met me in Sydney. He informed me that our relationship was over and that he was in love with my girlfriend. They left me on the street with the two children and drove back to Canberra. I had no money, but luckily I still had my return ticket to Canberra so I caught the next train back and kicked them out of the house. They slept in the car for a short time and then returned to the city.

Life was good for a few peaceful weeks. But he came back alone and

tried to win me over. I guessed that he was preparing the ground for a lifestyle of traveling between me and her. When he got more and more abusive, I was forced to leave with my two small children who were then aged three and four. I was made homeless. I went to the ACT housing authority and asked if the lease of the cottage could be transferred to me. I told them that I was not married to my so called husband. The authority told me that as a single man, he was not entitled to the cottage. However they told me that he could transfer the lease to me if he made a statement to that effect.

I asked my defacto and he refused, giving as a reason that he needed the cottage for his pregnant girlfriend. She was not pregnant at that time. It was a lie. He just didn't care what happened to me or our children. I went back to the housing authority and asked for emergency accommodation, but I was refused. I was advised to put my name down for a flat. So that's what I did. The waiting time was two years. I waited. At least in the 1960s, government accommodation was sufficient with an array of hostels, prefab and monocrete homes brought in to house the Territory's rapidly growing population.

My salary was not enough, being five eighths of the male wage, to be able to afford private accommodation as well as child care while I was at work. I asked the local member for help in persuading the Department of Housing to allocate me a flat, but nothing happened. I went to the local priest who prayed, but nothing happened. God was not on my side that day. My parents were not forthcoming with help either. "After all", my mother said, "they are illegitimate and they would be better off in a children's home than being with you. You will be able to get on with your life." I had no choice but to put my two babies in a home in Sydney so many miles away from me. Meanwhile my defacto husband got to keep the house where he installed his girlfriend who became pregnant some months later.

Two years went by and I was allocated a two bedroom flat and my children joined me. By now they were in school my son in kindergarten and my daughter in first class. They were not the same happy little ones I carted off to the children's home. They were too quiet and seemed older than their chronological age. They had lost so much in their time away from me. I was traumatised myself and ill equipped to give them the love and reassurance they needed. I was doomed to recreate the nightmare family of my birth. At the time I didn't realise this and if I did, there was not much I could have done without a lot of help, which was never forthcoming. My parents as usual were uncommunicative, uncommitted and polite, but stern. My mother issued insulting homilies and my father hid behind his silence.

I was working a few blocks away from the flats. When the children came down with acute measles I had no one to look after them. I would go to work, rush home at lunch time to see if they were OK, rush back to work and come home later in the day exhausted.

After the measles passed both children were hospitalised, my daughter with pneumonia and my son with pleurisy. As a single mother I was having a tough time. Money was, as usual, in short supply. Nearly every night we ate minced meat and potatoes or just potatoes. Treats were rare. Second hand goods were not available as post war production was not up to speed so everything the children needed had to be bought new. There was apparent affluence but this only applied to males who received the lion's share of everything, money, status, opportunities and wives of course, who were their own personal slaves.

In the 1960s there were few overtly unmarried mothers. Most had gone to ground, one way or another. So as a statistic, unmarried mothers did not exist. I was the only brazen hussy I knew. I never made a secret of my marital status. I didn't realise that my honesty made my life even harder as men who were quick to scent fresh meat, hung around me hoping to score.



The band of brothers patrol the streets, oblivious to the acts of domestic violence hidden in the houses below them. But the houses cannot contain such violence forever. All secrets are revealed eventually.

Part 4 Domestic violence

It was against this background of exploitation, deprivation and uncertainty that my ex-defacto came calling. He complained bitterly that he had been tossed out of his girlfriend's bed. In a panic I allowed him back into my life. He moved in, I became pregnant with what I would call the anchor baby. Every woman in the flats wanted a real house with a yard and a house with a bit of space. But to get one, the family had to consist of a husband, a wife and three children, preferably of mixed sexes. So with grim forbearance I decided to take up with him again. By now he was divorced, but I could not find a logical reason why I should up and marry him in spite of my parents demanding an explanation for my anti-social attitude.

My defacto husband's behaviour was unusually odd, even for him. He took off to work in faraway places, never sending money and showing up rarely. When he was in town, he kept on asking me who was the father of the expected baby. I would just laugh and reassure him that it was his. I did not know that a man, once a friend, was making allegations that my defacto was not the father. He was a nasty serial monogamist just like my defacto. The two of them were friends, but were very competitive. My defacto took every opportunity to impress on the other man that I was a virgin when I met him. The friend was living with a woman who was not a virgin when she met him. So the stakes between the two men were high. Deflowering a virgin was the highest honour any man could achieve.

At last my youngest daughter arrived. I was pretty knocked up after a difficult breech birth so I slept for most of the following day. Apparently my defacto had come to the hospital and had seen the baby and left without waking me up. That night he appeared with his ex-girlfriend whom he had brought as a "witness" to whatever drama he had planned. He stood there and demanded to know the name of the father. I was in no shape to cope with this assault. I called the nurse and demanded that she bring me the baby, who had been resting after her difficult birth. The ex-girlfriend saw my baby, burst into tears and sobbed that she looked just like her daughter when she was born.

The man's ego was well and truly punctured. After this I shut the door to our relationship, but it would take me two years to make my successful escape from him. Life apparently returned to normal. I went to see the Department of Housing and applied for a three bedroomed house. I was told that in order to get one I would have to produce a marriage certificate. So with misgivings, I married the man and we got the house, which was in my name. I reflected with irony that the housing authority had achieved where my parents had failed. I had been forced by circumstances to observe the nuptial rights which preserved patriarchal succession and guaranteed that any offspring belonged to the father.

Luckily for me, my husband was disinterested in being a father. So when it came to our divorce he was more anxious to move onto his next conquest than in paying any attention to our children. By now he had five children including two from his former wives. When my parents became aware that our marriage was in trouble, they descended. Sitting in my kitchen, my father asked if I had been unfaithful to my husband, a typical male preoccupation. My mother told me that it was inevitable that disobedient wives will cop a beating from their husbands, a typical female preoccupation, which was submit or perish.

It didn't bother them that I was in the fight of my life as my husband was threatening to kill me. They had no words of love or support. They obviously felt justified in grilling me in this demeaning, misogynist way. They would never put such questions to their sons. This took place in 1965 a few years before the women's movement challenged these archaic, damaging attitudes. This didn't help me at the time. I felt utterly alone in a dangerous world.

I finally broke free of this man. After a loud argument, with him threatening me while I was quietly getting about my business, I decided it was time to go. When he took his afternoon nap, I grabbed the children, jumped into my car and drove away. I found accommodation of sorts. I went to work and the children went to school. He hung around for a while occupying my house while he plotted his next move. His life there was not too comfortable. I had cut off the electricity, then I called the police to arrest him because he had breached the apprehended violence order I had taken out. He stalked me personally and tried to kidnap the children. He was stopped by a policeman who was passing. He then invested the child support money in hiring a private investigator. The investigator's report landed in my letter box after my husband had been evicted.

Another letter was about some woman from Germany whom he had sponsored and then bedded her as soon as she hit the Australian shore. He had set a honey trap claiming that he was a qualified engineer and that he owned his own home. After the one night stand she vanished. Lucky her. He left town shortly after and some years later was put in jail for non-payment of child support for our children. I let him off with a token payment because he had gotten some young woman pregnant. I decided I would rather be poor than have anything to do with his money or him. She had two children. He stayed with her. She must have been more forebearing than his three other wives.



I came to terms with my demons, even befriending them. I spurned Christianity which caused the proselytizers to descend on me, armed with raised crosses. I turned the dogs on them. God tried to tell me off but I gave him the middle finger.

Part 5 Emerging from male domination

After my marriage ended and the divorce decree finalised, I got a new live-in boyfriend, not the best choice but he was at least generous and we were never hungry again. I studied to be a librarian and then I went to art school for three years. After that I received a Bachelor of Education and an International Women's Year grant to write a history of Australian women artists. I also taught art in Canberra high schools. I was slowly emerging from the frightening nightmare my parents and my ex-husband rained down on my head. Then,

when I was on the home stretch, I had a complete nervous breakdown which persisted for seven years. My way of dealing with my pain was to work. In these years I continued to make art, write books and move house. But I remained silent and unknowing about what had happened in my former harrowing life.

The cause of my breakdown arose from the traumas I had suffered for more than twenty years when I never had any idea of who I was or why. Hitherto I had been cool about my experiences. I knew bad things had happened, but they remained locked away and I just got on with my life instead of trying to acknowledge the abuse and coming to terms with it. My ex-husband and parents had already died before I ready to ask myself as to why did I go on loving them when they didn't love me? However recently, with the help of a good counsellor, I have faced and disciplined, my demons. The pain does not go away, but I have learned how to manage it without allowing my whole life to be disrupted.

The years that I spent raising my children in Canberra, visits from my brothers and from my ex-husband's brother and wife were largely non-existent. When we were growing up at least we had cousins, aunts and uncles. We used to take holidays together and there was a sense of kinship. My children had none of this. My parents came on rare occasions, armed with platitudes. I was unable to visit my brothers as I did not have a reliable car or enough money for the petrol. And they didn't visit me. In addition, the effort of keeping my household going had drained all of my energies. I was alone with the silliest man I could find and three traumatised children

My father died in 1969. On the day he died my mother told me that I was the cuckoo in their little nest. This suggested that I was either an alien, a throwback or that my mother's nice daughter was swapped at birth for a cuckoo child. She died in 2011. Since then we siblings have had an annual family get together to commemorate our parents' lives. I used to go as a token gesture. However, I feel I have nothing to celebrate and plenty to remember.

Now in my eighth decade I have published my autobiography. The reason it took me so long was because I was reluctant to face the fallout from the family when I told the truth of what was done to me. Also the emotional cost of publishing this has been significant. Currently, most members of my family are so appalled that they refuse to discuss my book. One of my brothers forbade me to publish a rather unflattering image of my father or otherwise, as he stated rather obliquely, I stood to be expelled from the family. Perhaps he forgot this was done to me over and over again. Since then I extended the olive branch to them, but the response has been no response. Their wall of silence is their only defense on what was an egregious attack on me as a young and rather naive seventeen year old. Being silent in the face of cruelty is to be complicit.

My story exposes how the patriarchy operated in the 1950s. My brothers

had an entirely different upbringing to mine. The curse of illegitimacy hung like a sword over every woman. Abortion was constrained by law. If a girl got pregnant it was either disappear and have the baby adopted, or pass off the baby as belonging to a close relative, or marry quickly, or live as a secret defacto.

My four brothers, like all men at that time, were entitled to have sex without responsibility for pregnancy, marriage, or birth control. I can only assume my brothers had sex before marriage, and further, I can also assume that there was a couple of expeditious marriages. If this were not the case, then my brothers would have been the exception. And no male in those day would want to be excluded from the boy's club. In the fabulous 1950s men got away with being the epitomy of irresponsibility.

My parents were unable to love their children, so they couldn't teach them to love each other. My brothers were raised by an emotionally distant father and a mother who was in a world of her own. My brothers and I were vulnerable to being emotionally illiterate just like our parents. I don't know if my brothers overcame this bleak start in their lives because we are strangers. I have had an advantage in that as a woman, emotional work does not frighten me. So by now I am at ease with myself.

But I am still sad that I was not loved enough to learn how to be a loving mother to my own children. I created the same sterile family life that my parents imposed on their children. The outcome is the same but with different dynamics at play. I believe the curse is intergenerational cruelty which has its origins in the great grandparents on both sides who subscribed to a misanthropic version of Christianity. As colonial conquest has demonstrated, nobody can be quite as cruel as a Christians on a mission and we had our fair share of proselytizers.

The feminists of the 1960-1970s got rid of the 1950s social obsession with "bastard" children born out of wedlock. The word "wedlock" is a giveaway. The legitimacy of children was assured by locking a woman into a marriage where economic constraints kept her in her place as the faithful, obedient wife of the man who controlled the money, the titles, the property and the children. Such marriages were just as an effective as an iron chastity belt. This meant that the family property was inherited by the father's legitimate male heir, rather than by some random bastard who was the result of the wife's infidelity. Of course any infidelity on the part of the husband was made to disappear. That this was even relevant to the 1950's is a historic travesty which destroyed women like me.

At least my mother lived long enough to see some of her patriarchal beliefs smashed by the feminists. However there is a postscript to this story. My mother left her real estate to her oldest son, disenfranchising the rest of her children. This was so Victorian, totally out of place in 2011 when she died. Two of my brothers were executors of her will. They divided the estate up equally, less gifts which had

been doled out by her over the years. They did their best to ensure equality but I would have been more content with equality of opportunity, a fine distinction which escapes most people.

Did my mother ever acknowledge what she and my father did to me? No. Did she ever relinquish her parental authority to treat me as an equal? No. Did she ever have a moment of empathy for her children and other vulnerable people? Not that I can recall. At the end of her life she was writing silly, embarrassing, saccharine ditties about her children. If that was her expression of love, then it was too little, too late, at least for me.

My mother died with her prejudice, her vitriolic tongue, her pride and her ignorance intact at the age of ninety five and eleven months. If even for a brief moment either she or my father had honestly loved me, I would have returned it so many times over. But this requires the ability to be open, the capacity to self reflect and humility in the face of legitimate criticism. They didn't have it so they couldn't pass it on to their children.

We, my brothers and I, have had to invent ourselves early in our lives. Our parents did not nurture us emotionally or help us through difficult times. My brothers fared better than me because they were males in a man's world, whilst I was always the outsider, along with every other woman of the 1950s. Currently, my brothers have not acknowledged my autobiography. I would like to have some discussion with them about our family, but I am not hopeful. The comment by Australia's Army Chief, David Morrison, who said "the standard you walk past is the standard you accept," refers to so called good people who are silent when wrongful deeds are committed. Australian men need to call out misogynistic behaviour if we are going to get rid of the current surge of domestic violence against women.

My task now is to remain resolute and not allow anyone's shit to run me down.

Details of the book's availability are at www.irrepressible.space. This is a five part synopsis of "Made to be Broken" and is illustrated with paintings by Caroline Ambrus.