



# **Disaster in Relation to Attachment, Loss, Grief and Recovery: The Marysville Experience.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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*The never-ending tear*

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September – 2017

## Declaration by the Candidate

I, David Brandon Barton, declare that:

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## Dedication

This project is dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Black Saturday bushfires of the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009.

To the 173 victims who lost their lives – may they rest in peace, and their loved ones find comfort.

To the many thousands of survivors – may they find the strength, courage and resolve to recover, to continue, and to rebuild their lives.

To all of them, to all of us, I dedicate this work.

I also dedicate this work to my mother, Margaret Barton, who passed away on 29/3/2015 during the course of the project and did not live to see the finished work.

*– Always remembered – Always by my side –*

### **Disclaimer:**

The views expressed in this thesis are the views of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the Marysville community collectively or of any individual Marysville community member.

## **Author Background and Context – David Barton**

It is not usual to have an author background at the beginning of a dissertation. However, given the context and autoethnographic nature of the thesis, the inclusion of such information at the commencement of the thesis will enhance reader understanding. Hence, it is important for the reader to know a little of my personal and professional background, education and experience that has informed my observations and conclusions over the last seven years of this project.

Over time I have operated my own research, consulting and lobbying company ('DBA Research and Consulting Group') and my own landscape gardening and home maintenance business ('DBA Quality Landscapes and Home Maintenance'), along with my Marysville antiques and collectables shop ('Chaffcutters') which was burnt down on Black Saturday. I also hold a Commercial Helicopter Pilot's Licence and Private Fixed-wing Pilot's Licence.

By way of professional qualifications, I hold a Diploma of Youth Work (1979), a Certificate of Youth Suicide Risk Assessment (1993), a Diploma of Ministry and Management (1995), a Bachelor of Arts in Counselling (2007), a Master's Degree by thesis entitled "Non-custodial Fathers' Experiences of Attachment, Loss and Grief" (2010), and a Certificate II in Public Safety (SES Rescue) (2010).

In my earlier life I spent over 20 years as a youth worker, community development worker, researcher and parliamentary lobbyist. With a strong community-based facilitation background, I know how community development processes are supposed to work. Over the years I have conducted many community meetings and created and launched many new community-based organisations, including in 2007 the *Marysville and District Chamber of Commerce*, and was elected its inaugural President, a position I held through 2007-2008.

As a State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer from January, 2008, through to March, 2012, I received bravery and service awards as a result of my service to the community on Black Saturday. However, I was later stood down by VICSES management on spurious grounds and have yet to be reinstated. I continue to seek a resolution to this matter.

Unfortunately, my wife Jennifer left me in January, 2011. After almost two years of adversarial action in the Family Court, we were divorced in January, 2013.

I do not come to community work as a novice and have become well-qualified to undertake a project of this nature.

## Acknowledgements

As with any major project of this nature there are many people to be acknowledged and thanked for their support.

\* Many people of Marysville and district gave their time to talk about and be interviewed for this project. Over seven years I spoke with more than 90 people, often repeatedly, about the fire and its aftermath. I thank you all for sharing your individual experiences and our collective journey over that time. I thank in particular those who have, though extended interviews, freely shared with me their life experiences since Black Saturday.

\* I thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Paul Battersby and Dr Blythe McLennan, without whom I would never have made it to the finish line. To the team at the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre<sup>1</sup> (BCRC), I offer my thanks for your support whilst I was a part of the BCRC during my scholarship period. My sincere thanks also to Adjunct Professor Jim McLennan and to disaster psychologist Dr Rob Gordon for support and advice when called upon.

\* I thank my good friends for their support and encouragement, and in particular, my partner, Elizabeth Hayes, and Peter Allen, my friend of 21 years and copy editor of the thesis, and also friends Felicity Renowden, Bob McNamara and Alan Hunt. I am also particularly indebted to Katrin Oliver, who, at the time as a Salvation Army *Pathways* worker in Marysville, first introduced me to the concept of Solastalgia.

\* I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship, without which assistance this project would not have been possible.

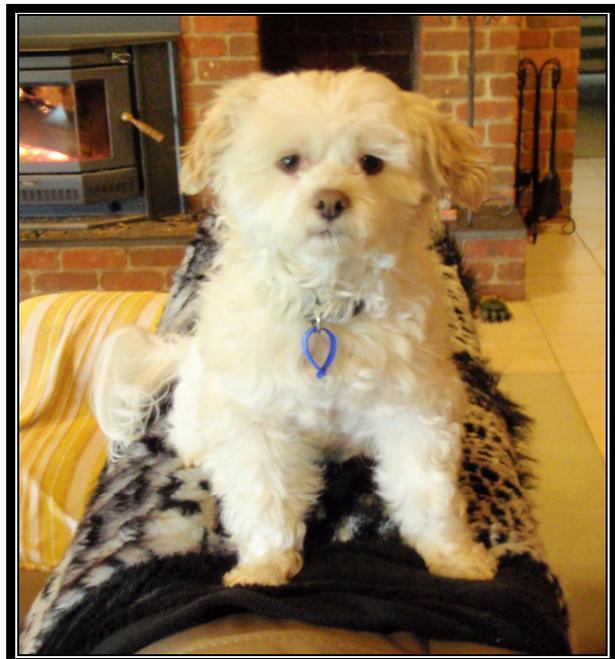
\* I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of a Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre Scholarship, which greatly assisted with the first 3½ years of this project.

\* And ...

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<sup>1</sup> Now the 'Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre' (BNHCRC).

... to 'Jack', my little man; my 15-year-old Maltese-Lhasa-Apso cross dog. He was all I was able to save from our house before it burned down on Black Saturday, and who has been my constant companion, shadow, comfort and support ever since. Sadly, Jack passed away at 8.04am on Friday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 2017, on the last day of editing this thesis.



With much sincere appreciation to you all ...

David Barton

September, 2017



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## Author’s Notes:

1) As shall be seen in the course of this dissertation, the thesis is an autoethnography. The reader will notice grey-shaded portions at the beginning of each chapter and at the end of some others. These portions are the author’s autoethnographic reflections, and form a part of the introduction and conclusion to each chapter. Grey shading is also used to denote first-person quotes from interviewees and others throughout the thesis.

2) A List of Figures, Tables, Diagrams and Photographs has not been provided as, in the context of this autoethnographic thesis, such a list would be cumbersome and redundant. Ownership of images is attributed where known.

3) The American Psychological Association (APA) style of referencing is used throughout the thesis.

4) Some internet hyperlinks, especially in relation to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) are no longer connected, as the material has now been archived.

## **Thesis Abstract**

### **“Disaster in Relation to Attachment, Loss, Grief and Recovery: The Marysville Experience.”**

David B Barton

The thesis is a study of the post-2009 Black Saturday bushfire community of Marysville. The central research question asks: ‘How did survivors of the Marysville Black Saturday bushfire experience attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process?’ This informs two specific sub-questions, which are: ‘What were the experiences of Marysville residents in the aftermath of the fire, particularly regarding their sense of attachment, loss and grief?’ and ‘What can we understand about attachment, loss and grief in disaster recovery from their experiences?’

To answer these questions the research includes my own autoethnographic story utilising the technique of evocative autoethnography to which is integrated the technique of analytical autoethnography, thereby providing a thorough theoretical base for qualitative research and data collection. In addition to the autoethnographic research, further phenomenological and ethnographic data collection and analysis consisted of 18 formal in-depth interviews, 16 semi-formal interviews and 49 informal interviews (a total of 83 interviews), which accounted for about a third of the Marysville population at that time.

The research also involved extensive literature and document collection and review. Heuristic and naturalistic analyses were used to interpret and make sense of the information. Data collection concluded in late 2013; however, analysis, interpretation and member checking continued throughout the project. Findings emerged as two main themes, replete with examples, or illustrations. The two themes are:

1. Attachment: the importance of post-disaster attachment behaviour in relation to people, possessions, pets, place and participation (the five Ps) particularly as related to topophilia and solastalgia.

2. Disempowerment: the post-disaster effect upon individuals and the community when they effectively have the ability to make their own decisions removed from them at both micro and macro levels.

Of central importance in this study is the identification of a post-disaster phenomenon I have conceptualised and named as 'Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma' (PDAT). This is a new revelation that describes a disruption to the natural processing of early attachment-related human loss and grief responses, particularly regarding initial appraisal and searching behaviours. It results in further trauma which may delay and complicate grieving and recovery for individuals and community alike.

When combined, the findings related to post-disaster attachment behaviour, topophilia, disempowerment, solastalgia and Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma make for a powerful description and compelling explanation of what many Marysville bushfire survivors have experienced.

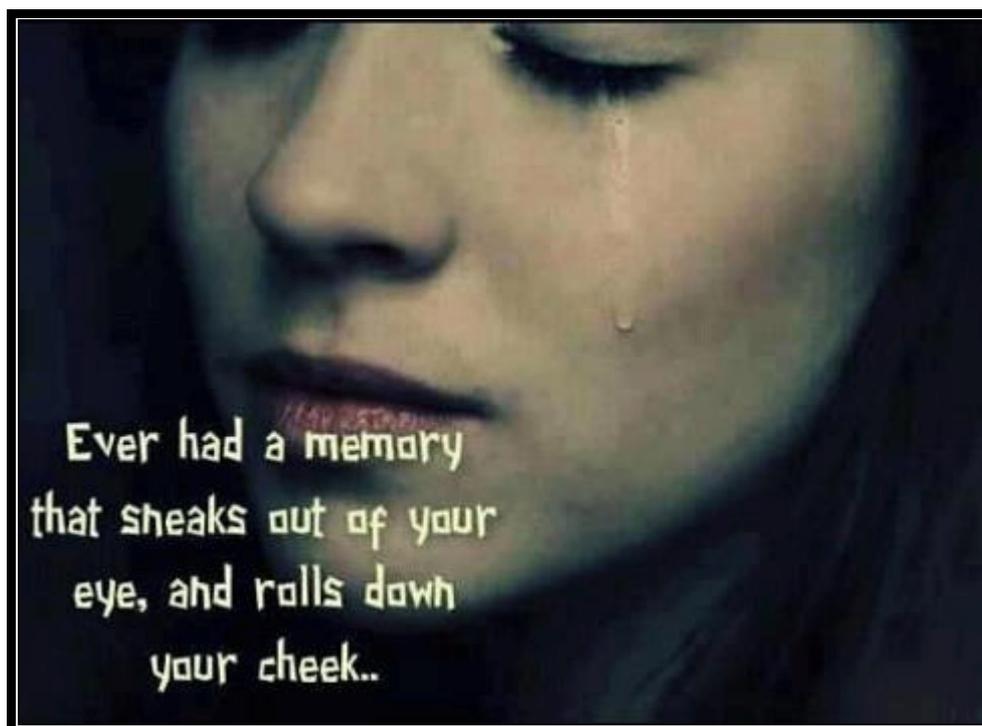
The research findings make their contribution to knowledge by discovering and explaining elements of individual and collective post-disaster experiences, particularly the role of attachment behaviour in recovery. The findings have implications for individual and collective resilience, recovery and mental health. They will benefit policy makers, therapists, government agencies and non-government organisations in the way they assist post-disaster individuals and communities in the future.

This work is important because perhaps the lessons learned and knowledge gained will benefit future disaster survivors worldwide so they may not have to experience much of what the people of Marysville have struggled with since Black Saturday, 2009.

## List of Abbreviations:

<b>ABC:</b>	Australian Broadcasting Commission.
<b>ABS:</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics.
<b>ACPMH:</b>	Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health.
<b>AEMS:</b>	Australian Emergency Manual Series.
<b>AIDR:</b>	Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (supported by the Federal Attorney-General's Department, AFAC, ARC, and the BNHCRC).
<b>AFAC:</b>	Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council.
<b>ARC:</b>	Australian Red Cross.
<b>BCRC:</b>	Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Australia) (now defunct; the earlier incarnation of the new BNHCRC).
<b>BNHCRC:</b>	Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (Australia).
<b>CFA:</b>	Country Fire Authority (Victoria, Australia).
<b>CRC:</b>	Community Recovery Committee (Victoria, Australia).
<b>COAG:</b>	Council Of Australia Governments.
<b>DSE:</b>	Department of Sustainability & Environment (now defunct; an earlier incarnation of the new DELWP, Victoria, Australia).
<b>DELWP:</b>	Department of Land, Water and Planning (Victoria, Australia).
<b>EMA:</b>	Emergency Management Australia (a division within the Federal Attorney-General's Department).
<b>EMV:</b>	Emergency Management Victoria (Australia).
<b>FRRR:</b>	Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal.
<b>FRU:</b>	Fire Recovery Unit (Victoria, Australia).
<b>MSC:</b>	Murrindindi Shire Council (Victoria, Australia).
<b>NACFAIE:</b>	National Advisory Committee For Animals In Emergencies (Australia).
<b>NGO:</b>	Non Government Organisation.
<b>NSW:</b>	New South Wales (a State in Australia).
<b>NSWRFS:</b>	New South Wales Rural Fire Service.
<b>PDAT:</b>	Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma.
<b>PTSD:</b>	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
<b>SES:</b>	State Emergency Service (Australia).
<b>RSL:</b>	Returned and Services League (Australia).
<b>UNISDR:</b>	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.
<b>VBRRRA:</b>	Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority.
<b>VBRC:</b>	Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

## Chapter One: *Introduction*



**Figure 1.1:** It is said that a tear is made up of 1% water and 99% emotions. Sometimes such emotions sneak out our eyes and roll down our cheeks ...<sup>2</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2009 changed my life forever. Within days it was already being called ‘Black Saturday’ by journalists and politicians alike. The name catches the immense trauma of the uncontrollable bushfires that took 173 lives,<sup>3</sup> injured 414,<sup>4</sup> destroyed 2,133 homes<sup>5</sup> and cost more than \$4.4 billion.<sup>6</sup> The next day, Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, I had been thrust into a new life not of my own making, not of my own choosing, and certainly not of my own desire.

What began that day was an arduous journey, the most difficult, confronting and painful I have ever endured in my life. It continues to this very day, over eight years later, showing little sign of abating. Many in our community suffered awful loss in the form of the physical death of family members and friends, and the loss of homes, pets, possessions, lifestyle and the physical environment of our community. For me

<sup>2</sup> **Source:** [http://www.facebook.com/home.php?clk\\_loc=5#!/photo.php?fbid=459592904117430&set=a.432513643492023.52524239.432512153492172&type=1&theater](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?clk_loc=5#!/photo.php?fbid=459592904117430&set=a.432513643492023.52524239.432512153492172&type=1&theater)

<sup>3</sup> **Source:** Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. (VBRC). (2010e). p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> **Source:** <http://phoenixaustralia.org/about/paying-our-respects/bushfire/>

<sup>5</sup> **Source:** VBRC. (2010e). p.13.

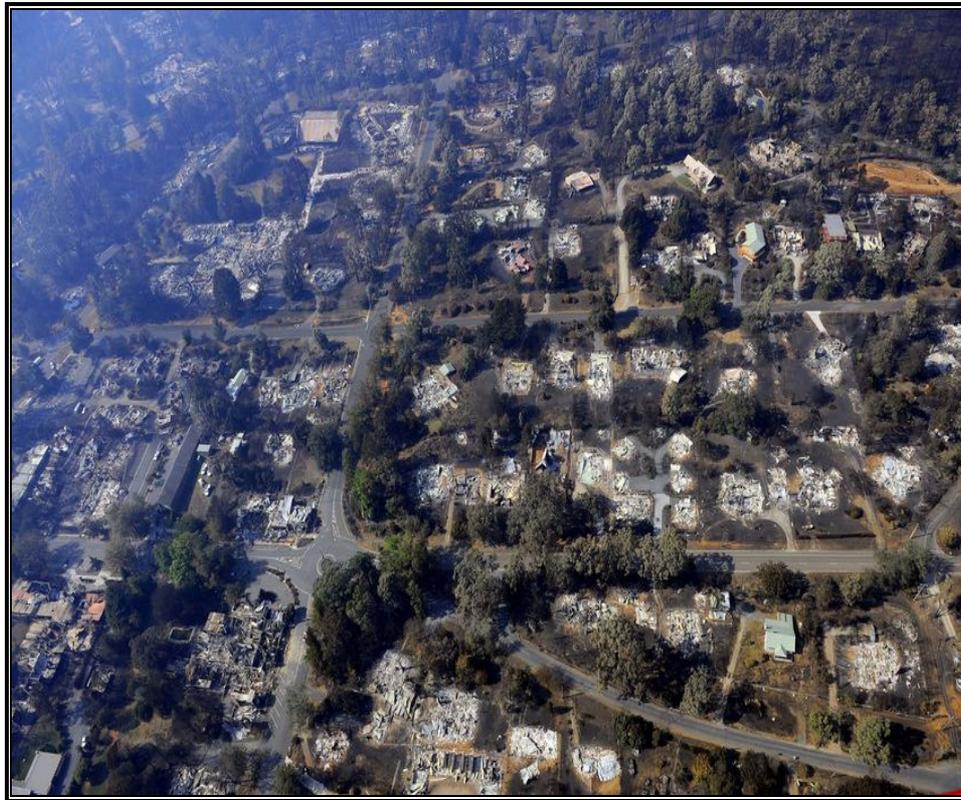
<sup>6</sup> **Source:** Gray, D. (2010).

personally, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, many things either died instantly that day, or began dying slowly thereafter.

Six weeks after the fires the sun was shining. Late on Friday afternoon, the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2009, after six long weeks of waiting, we're finally allowed back to Marysville; back home. At the roadblock the policeman checked my driver's licence and gave me a sticker for my windscreen; I'm allowed through. It was not the first time I'd been back to my property, but it was the first time without someone watching over my shoulder. The town was still a scene of utter devastation; piles of burnt blackened rubble stacked in ugly disjointed heaps that were once homes and shops. The shock hit me again that everything was gone. Spatters of seemingly out-of-place residual green mixed in amidst a sea of sooty-black and dirty-brown multiple heaps of smelly, twisted rubble where homes and shops once stood, where lives were once lived, where a town once thrived. The pungent stench of burnt objects still hung in the air. The power, water and telecommunications workers were mostly gone. The town was deserted, save for a few returning residents like me. At last I got to my place, the desolate and rancid ruins of my home. I walked amongst the remains of its carcass. Recent rain had turned much of the burnt remains into mush. I was home, but very much alone. The sense of loss was overwhelming. The tears welled up.

This thesis is about a real place called Marysville, a small town in the state of Victoria, Australia, and about some of the people who live there. Marysville is situated in the Local Government Shire of Murrindindi. It's an hour's drive to the North East of Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria, and its coordinates are Latitude 37° 50' 00" South, Longitude 145° 74' 78" East. The areas adjoining Marysville are collectively known locally as 'the Triangle', encompassing the towns of Buxton and Narbethong, along with the hamlet of Granton (which lies between Marysville and Narbethong – see maps on pp 103-104). For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Marysville was a bustling town of around 600 people, having been built on a now-waning timber industry. By 2005 the last sawmill had closed, yet log trucks still travel through the town to this day. Pre-fire, Marysville was becoming a quaint and picturesque sleepy hamlet with a declining population; a retirement town, albeit nevertheless at times a busy tourist destination with a variety of shops, guesthouses and other accommodation, and, with nearby Lake Mountain Alpine Resort, winter snow

activities as well. As partially shown in **Figure 1.2** below, the town of Marysville was all but wiped out on Black Saturday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009.



**Figure 1.2:** Marysville the day after Black Saturday.<sup>7</sup>

Australia is a continent forged by volcanoes and earthquakes, its landscapes fashioned by floods and fire (Clode, 2010; Collins, 2006; Gammage, 2011; Pyne, 1991). In the last 150 years Victoria has suffered over 50 major fires involving either loss of human life, loss of homes and buildings, loss of livestock, extensive land area burnt, or a combination of all four, with many of them occurring in just the last 15 years. (See **Appendix A** for more detail.) Without doubt, the most costly in terms of human life and financial expense was the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009; the Black Saturday fires.

With the recent expansion of urban populations into what has become known as the ‘peri-urban interface’ (a combination of urban development amidst thick bushland; see Allen, 2003; Cottrell, 2005; Cottrell and King, 2007), the risk to life and property from fire has intensified. This potentially explosive combination of population and bushland can result in great loss of life and property, as was proved on Black Saturday not only in Marysville, but in locations like Kinglake, Strathewen and Churchill.

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<sup>7</sup> **Source:** <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/02/07/2812346.htm?site=melbourne>

In Marysville, with a local pre-fire population of about 520 people, 27 local permanent residents perished in the fire, along with two non-permanent residents who had weekender properties, and six tourists who were visiting the area that day, making a total of 35 dead in the immediate Marysville area (VBRC, 2010a: 306-328). Of the approximately 550 buildings that were in pre-fire Marysville, only about fifty survived, 33 being houses, nine commercial buildings (including two Government Department buildings) and about eight sheds (Rishworth, 2009: 1). The Marysville district is still recovering and will continue to do so for many years. Some have said it will take a generation to recover and they may well be right. Of those who survived, just over half the town's population moved away from the area after the fires; the remainder stayed on and are in the process of rebuilding their lives<sup>8</sup>. This thesis investigates the effects of the Black Saturday disaster on the lives of people like me, and others in the community of Marysville.

## **A Rationale**

The thesis aims to make a contribution to the theory and practice of how we understand, respond to, manage, and recover from such disasters in the future. For me, the Black Saturday fires were a physically devastating experience made worse by the emotional and psychological trauma brought about by such overwhelming loss. For me, it was trauma exacerbated by the subsequent events chronicled in this thesis. The many personally invasive interventions that followed the fires made processing and recovering from what had happened to us so much harder.

In talking with others over time, which commenced immediately after the fires (as shown in **Figure 1.3** below) I found that many had experienced what I had, and many were feeling the same things I was feeling. Whilst my negative experiences and those of some others were not universally shared, all of our experiences contributed in varying degrees to personal, emotional and psychological pain and trauma during what was supposed to be the recovery process. It is against this backdrop that I decided to embark upon this project.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the population continues to fluctuate yet is steadily increasing. Some pre-fire residents who at first stayed have now left; other pre-fire residents who left after the fire have now returned, and many new people are coming to live in the town.



**Figure 1.3:** Answering one of many phone calls as I sat amongst the rubble of our home during the clean-up, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2009.<sup>9</sup>

## The Research Problem and Questions

This is an important story that needs to be told, so the thesis engages one primary research problem encapsulated in the main research question: ‘How did survivors of the Marysville Black Saturday bushfire experience attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process?’ To address that question I consider a series of related issues. First, what does the literature tell us about the deep psychological needs of people affected by traumatic disasters like the bushfires of Black Saturday? As a critical review of the literature suggests, it seems that insufficient attention has been given to investigating the experiences of survivors of major disasters, such as the residents of Marysville in the aftermath of the fire. In this thesis I investigate the way the fires affected survivors’ sense of attachment, and their experiences of loss and grief. Accordingly, I investigate what it is that we need to understand about attachment, loss and grief that is absent or inadequately addressed in the disaster recovery literature.

A second and closely related concern is to identify and better understand these reactions to disaster, and discover which research methods are most likely to illuminate experiences of attachment, loss and grief. This highlights the value of

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<sup>9</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: Nick Renowden.

framing the research as an exercise in phenomenology and ethnography, and indeed autoethnography,<sup>10</sup> and in establishing what these kinds of research methods can reveal about traumatic experiences in which attachment, loss and grief play a central role.

In the course of the project I address the research sub-questions, the first of which is ‘What were the experiences of Marysville residents in the aftermath of the fire particularly regarding their sense of attachment, loss and grief?’ A second sub-question follows with ‘What can we understand about attachment, loss and grief in disaster recovery from their experiences?’ These questions matter because, as we shall see in the literature review, they are issues that do not rate much mention and are rarely connected to the pragmatics of disaster recovery. Whilst loss and grief are clearly recognised within some disaster literature, the underlying connections to foundational elements of attachment, loss and grief behaviour in relation to disaster recovery are only now just beginning to emerge (Graham, 2013; Harms, 2015). If connections can be observed and established in understanding the role and effects of attachment behaviour in the loss and grief experience of disaster survivors, then perhaps this may shed light on ways to more effectively manage post-disaster recovery.

## **The Literature and Research Gaps**

Much has been written about disasters generally, and bushfires in particular, but there is still much to be learned about their human effects. Without an understanding of the emotional and psychological aspects of the phenomenon of bushfire, it is not possible to understand what people in the community of Marysville went through during and after Black Saturday, or to effectively answer the research questions. Whilst much literature discusses the mechanics of bushfire, it often omits to consider the short- and long-term emotional and psychological effects upon the people who both directly and indirectly experience it. (See for example: Carter, 1991; Clode, 2010; Collins, 2006; Cottrell, 2005; Drabek, 1986; Franklin, 2009; Handmer & Haynes, 2008; Kenny, 2013; Malseed & Packham, 2013; Pyne, 1991, 2009).

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<sup>10</sup> Autoethnography is described by its originator, Carolyn Ellis, as a form and method of social research intent on exploring and including researchers’ personal experiences and connecting their autobiographical account more broadly to cultural, political, and social contexts and interpretations (Ellis, 2004, Maréchal, 2010). Autoethnography is further defined in Chapter Three.

There is an emerging body of literature that addresses the psycho-social impact of disasters on communities like Marysville (eg: Drabek, 2010; Gow & Paton, 2008; Kent, Davis, & Reich, 2014; Phillips, 2009). Whilst many elements of that literature are comprehensive in noting the effects of loss and grief *per se*, only very recently (during the term of this research project) has there been discussion of the role of attachment in post-disaster trauma and loss and grief responses (eg: Gallagher, Richardson, Forbes, Harms, Gibbs, Alkemade, MacDougall, Waters, Block, Lusher, Baker, & Bryant, 2016; Harms, 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014).

The inclusion of elements of loss and grief distress in some post-disaster recovery literature is laudable; however, it falls short in that it does not examine or seek to understand the foundational or underlying causes of such distress. Without an examination of the foundational causes of such loss and grief distress and of its post-disaster manifestations, then comprehensive approaches to both individual and collective post-disaster response, management and recovery will remain deficient.

As will be seen in Chapter Two, the literature on post-fire disaster management reveals a strong focus on apex management,<sup>11</sup> technical issues, and physical (material) concerns, to the exclusion of a deeper analysis of short- and long-term personal and social effects. Further, whilst personal accounts and stories abound in both the mainstream media and in published book form, any rigorous examination or explanation of the contributory factors underlying these experiences and accounts is absent. This is confirmed by evidence given at the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC), (2010c) as detailed below.

During the VBRC, Pyne (VBRC, 2010c: 394), noted that most bushfire research occurs within three research streams, the Physical/Structural, the Biological/Environmental and the Cultural/Social, and that most occurs within the first two, with the latter category being somewhat neglected. The Royal Commissioners supported Pyne's observation about the dearth of "social-cultural" research. Pyne further noted that "internationally, 'there are too few researchers, and their study too narrow and exclusive'" (VBRC, 2010c: 395). He suggested that "urgent priority should be given to the social sciences" (VBRC, 2010c: 395).

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<sup>11</sup> Apex management being typically pyramidal, hierarchical and top-down militaristic and authoritarian styles of management.

Regarding further social research into disasters, Adams noted that “the cultural heading is the most difficult and challenging and needs a ‘long view’” (VBRC, 2010c: 395). This is certainly true. Undertaking a thesis of this nature is a difficult and sensitive task; however, the results, as shall be seen, are very worthwhile.

This thesis contributes to existing bodies of knowledge in cultural and social human services regarding human responses to natural disasters. It is designed, at least in part, to help redress the relative gaps in the research referred to by the VBRC. Whilst noting the need for research into “the long-term effect of trauma resulting from the experience of bushfire and specifically the effect of trauma on children” (VBRC, 2010c: 394), the Royal Commission did not list amongst its priorities for research the overall psycho-social human impact of the aftermath or recovery from disastrous bushfires. In my view that is a major oversight; however, to be fair, such investigations were not within the ambit of the Royal Commission’s Terms of Reference, but that fact alone helps to drive home the point.

The Royal Commission made only one recommendation related to research, being Recommendation Number 65.<sup>12</sup> It made no specific recommendations regarding further research into the overall efficacy of the recovery process. At the commencement of this project there had been little other academic research work completed of a comparable scope and depth regarding the Black Saturday disaster. However, more recently there have been several studies examining specific aspects of bushfire preparedness, response, recovery, resilience, and gender issues; reference is made to some of them in Chapter Two.

## **Attachment Theory**

The psychiatrist John Bowlby developed a theory about attachment behaviour between a mother and child in his 1953 publication *Child Care and the Growth of*

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<sup>12</sup> **VBRC Recommendation Number 65:** “The Commonwealth establish a national centre for bushfire research in collaboration with other Australian jurisdictions to support pure, applied and long-term research in the physical, biological and social sciences relevant to bushfires and to promote continuing research and scholarship in related disciplines.” (VBRC, 2010e: 37).

**Source:** <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/assets/vbrc-final-report-recommendations.pdf>

This recommendation has since been achieved with the establishment of the new ‘Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre’ (<http://www.bnhcrc.com.au>) in 2013-14, based in Melbourne, Victoria. However, as discussed in Chapter Seven, there still remains a paucity of research projects dedicated to the social sciences.

*Maternal Love*. This initial attachment research culminated in the 1969 publication of the first of a three-volume series *Attachment and Loss* (first published in 1969, 1973 and 1980). In recent decades Bowlby's attachment theory has been expanded to encompass many elements of human behaviour (for example: Ainsworth, 1991; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Bretherton, 1991, 1992; Fraley, 2004; Fraley & Shaver, 1998, 2000; Mikulincer, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014). Attachment theory now forms an established foundation upon which to examine many aspects of human behaviour.

However, attachment theory is only recently beginning to register in the context of disaster recovery research. Inquiry into foundational elements of attachment, loss and grief behaviour in relation to disaster recovery are only in their infancy, occurring only over the last six years (during the course of this research) yet, in my view, current research has still not delved deeply enough. Very little research to date has connected the way attachment to people, to possessions, to pets, to place, and to participation (in community and lifestyle) affects people's experiences of a disaster, perhaps resulting in emotional and psychological consequences of which we generally as yet remain unaware.

This thesis advances the claim that attachment behaviour plays a much more important role in survivors' immediate and long-term post-disaster experiences and recovery than is currently recognised. Consequently, attachment theory is a valuable framework and tool to explore those experiences. The intertwining of experience, behaviour and theory forms what we shall see to be the foundational basis of this thesis.

By considering a range of literature in Chapter Two, the thesis considers theories of attachment relevant to loss and grief as related to individual and collective disaster response. I argue that the attachment relationships people form with 'the five Ps' – other *People*, material *Possessions* ('things' and 'stuff'), *Pets* (and other animals), *Place* (and topophilia<sup>13</sup>), and *Participation* (community activity, way of life, or lifestyle) will all be greatly affected by a disaster and that these attachments are an

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<sup>13</sup> Topophilia – literally, the 'love of place', (as described by Betjeman, 1947, and Tuan, 1974) is closely aligned to attachment to place and may include one's home, one's property, the sight of familiar people and their homes and properties, local shops, streets, roads, gardens, trees, the bush and the environment generally. This is more fully described in Chapter Two.

important but under-recognised element in people's post-disaster recovery experience. Others too have already pointed in this direction, but not necessarily enunciated it clearly or specifically, (for example: Belk, 1988, 1990, 1992, 2010; Bowlby, 1974, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1988; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Fraley, 2004; Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, & Uvnäs-Moberg, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014; Parkes, 1969, 1986; Sonkin, 2005).

Bowlby's original attachment research, theories and conclusions were largely about a child's attachment behaviour towards its mother. However, from its humble beginnings Bowlby's original attachment theory has been broadened over recent decades by many researchers and authors into areas where Bowlby might never have imagined it would apply. For example, Hazan and Shaver (1987) introduced attachment theory into the idea of romantic love, as did Fraley and Shaver (2000) who explored attachment in adult romance. Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde and Marris (1991) considered attachment across the whole life cycle, whilst Hildalgo and Hernández (2001) and Low and Altman (1992) considered the role of attachment to a specific place. Kleine and Baker (2004) began to consider material possession attachment, and Manzo and Perkins, (2006) considered the importance of place attachment to community participation and planning. Mikulincer (2008) considered an attachment perspective on disordered grief reactions and the process of grief resolution. In my Master's Thesis I wrote about attachment theory in relation to non-custodial fathers' relationships with their children (Barton, 2010). Julius, et al., (2013) considered in detail attachment theory as related to pets. In 2014 Mikulincer and Shaver wrote about an attachment perspective on resilience to stress and trauma.

Attachment theory now has many applications. In this thesis, of greatest import, is its deepening connection to psychology, psychotherapy, counselling, neuroscience, death, loss and grief, interpersonal relationships, and attachment to people, possessions, pets, place and participation. Whilst such new attachment connections are too numerous to explore here in detail, attachment theory surfaces in many areas of contemporary research into human behaviour, including the emerging area of neuroscience (eg: Graham, 2013; Palmer, 2002). It is consequently appropriate to now apply these existing extensions of Bowlby's original work to the emerging field

of the emotional and psychological effects of disaster response, management and recovery, and that is what this thesis seeks, in part, to do.<sup>14</sup>

## **Significance and Contribution to Knowledge**

Given some of the critical omissions to which I have earlier alluded, it becomes clear why the thesis aims to understand the personal impact of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, and the recovery processes that followed, on those who lived through them. I inquired into experiences of destruction, loss and grief, of what it meant for those who lived through the fire, of how we variously understood and experienced attachment in the midst of disaster, and of how we attempted to reconstruct our lives in the aftermath. From a research perspective, this work is necessary. Indeed, regarding just one element of the variety of attachment behaviours, Proudley notes:

It is clear that more Australian research addressing the role of place attachment (and place detachment) within the context of disaster recovery and community resilience is needed.

(Proudley, 2013: 11)

In Australia, since Black Saturday 2009, disaster recovery and community resilience are developing academic fields that have implications for policy and practice. This thesis extends those concepts and makes both a theoretical and practical contribution to that field. Apart from other key findings of this research in relation to issues of attachment and disempowerment as described in Chapter Seven, a major contribution has been the discovery of the role of attachment-related post-disaster ‘appraisal and searching behaviour’, and what I have now termed ‘*Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma*’ (PDAT). I have defined it as:

*The occurrence of external post-disaster events (over which disaster survivors have little or no control) which when combined with the normal spontaneous human expressions of loss and grief innate to human attachment behaviour produces a disruption to the natural processing of early human loss and grief responses, particularly in relation to initial appraisal and searching behaviours,*

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<sup>14</sup> At the commencement of this research in 2011 there was little, if any, published work about attachment theory as related to the emotional and psychological effects of disaster response, management and recovery. As noted in more detail later in the thesis, this has changed in recent years.

*thereby resulting in further trauma which exacerbates stress, anger, grief, frustration and anxiety, which may then delay and complicate grieving and recovery.*

The research shows that for those individually and collectively affected by post-disaster events that are beyond their control and that interfere with their normal (attachment-based) processing of loss and grief, a ‘second disaster’<sup>15</sup> is experienced. I further contend that when ordinary human *Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma* responses are combined with other post-disaster recovery events that may also prove to be frustrating and traumatic, this too will become a contributor to, and may lead to, disempowerment, individual and collective depression, longer-term mental health issues, suicidal ideation and, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, to Solastalgia.<sup>16</sup>

The thesis is important because, as I report, much of the way the official response, recovery and rebuilding process of Marysville was managed was considered problematic for many residents, and has not been fully documented in the literature. Much of what occurred in the post-fire period can only be known by insiders, those who have lived through it all. By providing insider accounts (my own included) I hope to make a real difference to the way disasters of this scale are managed in the future, because the one thing we can be sure of is that a bushfire of the magnitude described in this thesis will one day happen again.<sup>17</sup>

## **Methods**

Given my interest in identifying some key features of the experiences of survivors, I had to identify a research approach that would enable me to do just that. From an overall perspective, should the approach be one of qualitative or quantitative research? A quantitative approach would tend more towards gathering numbers and

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of a ‘second disaster’ is loosely defined as another ‘disaster’ that occurs in the wake of the initial disaster. It is more fully explained and defined in Chapter Two on pages 31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Solastalgia is defined as “the homesickness you have when you are still at home” and when “you feel dislocated but you haven’t gone anywhere” (Albrecht, 2010). Solastalgia is more fully described in Chapter Seven on page 247ff.

<sup>17</sup> Apart from regular annual bushfire occurrences, there have been seven firestorm type fires in Victoria in the last 91 years (an average of one every 13 years) being: Black Sunday, 1926 (60 dead); Black Friday, 1939 (71 dead); State-wide fires, 1944 (51 dead); Ash Wednesday, 1983 (47 dead in Victoria; 28 dead in South Australia), the Alpine fire, 2003 (0 dead); the Great Divide fire, 2006-07 (3 dead); and Black Saturday, 2009 (173 dead). By average, another firestorm event in Victoria can be expected within the next five years. See **Appendix A** for more details.

confirming an existing hypothesis (an approach already used by many bushfire researchers, such as Bryant, Waters, Gibbs, Gallagher, Pattison, Lusher, MacDougall, Harms, Block, Snowdon, Sinnott, Ireton, Richardson, & Forbes, 2014; McLennan & Elliott, 2010), whereas I am more interested in exploring what people's experiences were, so preferred a more qualitative approach. It appeared to me that the more rigid, structured and numerical approach of raw numbers and statistics would not be sufficient to answer the research questions. Numbers can be sterile and limited in their ability to tell the story, and it is people's stories I needed to hear that would reflect their personal experiences of attachment. Hence, in order to fulfil that goal, and in addition to autoethnography, I also needed the more flexible approaches of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary investigation.

Having heard people's stories, I then needed to be able to make sense of them; however, my own personal involvement precluded a more objective approach. Somehow I had to be personally involved in the research as it was as much about me and my experiences as it was about the experiences of others. Because quantitative methodology has a differing underlying epistemology and usually takes a more extensive and statistically analytical approach using much larger sample sizes and data sets, it was viewed as being unsuitable for the purposes of this research.

Consequently, a qualitative approach was determined to be the most appropriate primary method for the project. But what kind of qualitative method should be used? Perhaps grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, autoethnography, action research, historical research, case studies or discourse analysis? (Berg, 2009; Hay, 2005). After much deliberation, a combined approach was adopted, based upon phenomenology, but drawing upon ethnography and autoethnography and employing the techniques of in-depth interviews, participant observation and document analysis.

The above approach was seen to be the most appropriate because of my own personal experience and involvement in the topic, the appropriate nature of the autoethnographic approach, the small sample size and the detailed intensive nature of the individual interviews. As such, the research is a thematic representation rather than a statistical representation, focusing on the *why* rather than the *what*. Instead of utilising specific sets of statistical information or broad and generalised statistical

data, the research is holistic and context-dependent utilising specific deep, rich material and idiographic, case-based “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973: 6) to examine motivations behind meanings to bring about deep understanding.

As a result, the research is qualitative in nature, conducting a phenomenological exploration within an ethnographic framework using the primary technique of autoethnography (my story) along with analytic autoethnography (my story as related to the literature) and individual interviews (others’ stories) which provide for additional comparisons of individual experiences. The thesis draws on the experiences of others in the community, accessing their stories through formal and informal in-depth semi-structured interviews, then utilising inductive data analysis techniques to make sense and meaning of what is discovered. The issue of trustworthiness, or validity, is also a consideration. Techniques engaged in this work include: member checking, interviewer corroboration, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, confirmability, and negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As noted earlier, the thesis makes use of grey-shading of blocks of text at the beginning and some conclusions of each chapter to highlight my own autoethnographic story and reflection. Photographs, figures, maps and diagrams are also used to illustrate key elements of the thesis. More detail about the methodology is contained in Chapter Three.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis has been autoethnographically constructed around my experiences during and after the Black Saturday fires. For this reason it is written in the first person. This structure also makes better sense of the subject matter regarding what happened in the lives of the people who were affected by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Indeed, I think it both inappropriate and impossible for me to write the thesis and to tell the story in any other way. Quotations from interviewees have also been grey-shaded and assigned a pseudonym, except where noted otherwise.

A part of my intention is to give voice to those who have not been heard in the official disaster recovery process, because it is they who have told me what it was like for them, and who shared many of the same experiences I had and interpreted them in the

same way. My aim is to give meaning to our collective experience, fundamental aspects of which have not been adequately recognised. The thesis is also a cathartic story of Black Saturday, a day in which I was deeply involved in the fire, and affected by it, as were many others in our community. This alone has merit and value for both our community and for me personally. Many of us would like to see how that experience and knowledge can be applied to future post-disaster response and recovery scenarios.

Further, as I personally participated in Black Saturday and all that has followed since, and now as a researcher, I can complete extensive research into that event from two perspectives – ‘insider’ (as participant) and ‘outsider’ (as researcher), as further discussed in Chapter Three. This appears to be an uncommon position, but not one without its difficulties, as we shall see later in the thesis. As an autoethnography and an ethnographic study, the dissertation adheres to many of the usual conventions and layout of thesis construction. The thesis is divided into eight chapters, with appendices, as follows:

**Chapter One: Introduction** – As above, provides the reader with a general introduction to, and explanation of, the thesis, highlighting a major finding of the research.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** – In this chapter I consider four separate sets of literature. First, the nature of historic and contemporary disasters is considered along with the implications for psycho-social effects, followed by discussion of related historic disaster management approaches. Secondly, contemporary approaches to disaster recovery are briefly reviewed along with consideration of important elements of such recovery. Thirdly, theories of attachment and loss, including the five Ps, of attachment to People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation are explained and considered. And finally, the attachment-related concepts of appraisal and searching behaviour are explained and discussed, along with a brief description of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. The literature review identifies some of the gaps this thesis seeks to fill.

**Chapter Three: Methods** – This chapter outlines the theoretical framework and methodological design of the thesis. It focuses on the primary method of phenomenology where I examine the nature and interpretation of human experience. The subset of ethnography is discussed along with methods of data generation and collection, and techniques of inductive data analysis. The interview process is described, and evocative and analytical autoethnography as applicable to the thesis is considered. The chapter reviews the topics of insider-outsider and emic-etic research and finally, considers the ethics of the project.

**Chapter Four: Background** – In this chapter I describe the town of Marysville both pre- and post-fire. My own autoethnographic account of the fire is provided, along with excerpts of the accounts of others. The chapter sets the scene with background information that becomes more relevant as illustrations and themes begin to emerge later in the thesis.

**Chapter Five: Response Phase** – This chapter describes some of the events and experiences that occurred for residents during the first eight-week response phase after the fires, including many accounts from interviewees. These events set the scene for the future experiences, wellbeing and recovery of many Marysville people, and for the community as a whole.

**Chapter Six: Recovery Phase** – This chapter considers the recovery phase, being the rebuilding of Marysville, as collected through interviews and other sources. It provides specific illustrations of not only my own autoethnographic story, but of the stories of others who were interviewed as a part of the research, and the experiences of what was occurring in the rebuilding and recovery of Marysville. The many illustrations are now beginning to point towards two emerging themes.

**Chapter Seven: Analysis** – In this chapter I provide further analysis and assessment of the relevance, meaning and importance of the emerging themes and illustrations, positioning them within the existing literature. Further discussion identifies important elements arising from my story and from the stories of others gained from the interviews, leading to critical analysis and conclusions. In this chapter the answered

research questions become increasingly relevant to post-disaster response authorities, policy-makers, and non-government organisations.

**Chapter Eight: Conclusion** – In the concluding chapter I sum up the key findings and arguments of the research and consider the implications of the answered research questions. I consider the importance of the two themes, the benefits, strengths and limitations of the thesis, propose areas for further research, offer suggestions for pre- and post-disaster policy reform, and finally, make recommendations as derived from the evidence. The Conclusion summarises the research and its outcomes. Following the Conclusion are the Appendices (listed A to J) that detail information relevant to the research.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Two:

### *Literature on Disaster, Recovery, Loss, Grief, and Attachment*

*All that we are is the result of what we have thought;  
the mind is everything – what we think we become.*

(The Buddha)

For me the exploration of the literature has been a vast, complex and fascinating undertaking. Over the last eight years I have read and written so much about bushfires and disasters;<sup>18</sup> yet for the answers I seek, there seems to be so little. Searching the literature has been a journey to find understanding, about answering the difficult questions, of making links between the different sets of literature. It's been about how best to make the right connections between the various and at times disparate literature so as to form a meaningful and conclusive whole. In the end, it has resulted in the development of a new theory that provides a credible explanation for what many of us have been through after the fires.

Understanding and meaning-making have only been possible through reference to the experiences of people like me who have endured a major disaster, and from the thoughts and writings of those who have gone before me. What follows here is the final outcome of many years of reading, distillation, and of numerous iterations of this chapter now coalescing into one form to put theoretical meaning and understanding behind the post-fire experiences of many Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors.

Disasters have long been understood as a part of the human condition and the natural order of things. Indeed, Lucretius is said to have observed in 56 BCE that “Disaster exists everywhere in human life ... It comes into being and flies about in different ways whether through chance or force of nature, because nature made it so” (in Muller, 2007: 252). The manner in which humanity experiences and manages disaster is perhaps less well understood and has evolved over time.

The origins of this thesis go back to my sense that our experiences as survivors of the 2009 Marysville bushfires exposed major faults in the response and recovery process.

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<sup>18</sup> There are now well over 24,000 separate documents listed on my computer within my PhD folders.

My own post-fire experiences as outlined in Chapter Four, and the experiences of people who I know as friends and neighbours, all pointed in that direction. It was such intuition that shaped this thesis and leads me to examine in this chapter some of the key literature on disaster management and attachment theory. Survivors' experiences confirm Winkworth's (2007) widely acknowledged view that disasters affect human communities by way of death, injury, anguish, pain, misery, material and personal loss and ensuing grief. This chapter establishes where my experiences and this research sit within the larger body of work about disasters, and disaster recovery.

Whilst much has been written about disasters and disaster recovery over many years, there appears to be a number of gaps in our understanding of the short- and long-term effects of a disaster and disaster recovery on individuals and whole communities. It is here that I engage the task of identifying some of those gaps. This further becomes clear when I consider the way the dominant 'Chaos, Command and Control' (Krolik, 2013) models of disaster management and recovery work, and the possible role they play in exacerbating the trauma so many survivors experienced. However, to begin with it is worth considering the nature of disaster and both historical and contemporary approaches to disaster management and response.

## **Disaster and its Psycho-social Effects**

Perry (2007) notes there are many definitions of disaster, with Brown (2007) defining a disaster as a "sudden or great misfortune; an event of ruinous or distressing nature, a calamity, a complete failure" (p 695). More specifically, the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) defines a disaster as "sudden events that cause great damage, destruction and human suffering" that may also "overwhelm local capacity, necessitating requests to a national or international level for external assistance" (Guha-Sapir, Vos, Below, with Ponserre, 2012: 7).

Understandings of disaster have historically been divided into two traditions, the first *hazard* focused<sup>19</sup> and the second from a classic sociological perspective of *social disruption* (Perry, 2007). The focus of the hazards tradition is upon the physical event

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<sup>19</sup> The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) defines a 'hazard' as: "A dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage." (UNISDR, 2009).

itself, whether natural (such as fire, flood, earthquake, tsunami or volcano) or human (such as war, terrorism, biological or technological) in origin, and its subsequent cost in terms of loss of life or damage to property. This approach is preoccupied with the origins, nature, speed, size and other physical attributes of the event (Perry, 2007; Winkworth, 2007).

However, the classic sociological perspective instead defines a disaster in terms of the *social disruption* caused by the hazard agent with little regard to the hazard itself. The common element across these two traditions that remains central to modern disaster research is that the effects of the event, hazard or disaster are “serious and overwhelming, exceeding the ability of those affected to cope with it using the resources and capacities that are normally available to them” (United Nations, in Coppola, 2007: 25). Modern understandings of disaster are based upon Fritz’s influential 1961 definition that combined elements of both the above traditions, defining disaster in more precise terms as,

... an event concentrated in time and space, in which a society or one of its subdivisions undergoes physical harm and social disruption, such that all or some essential functions of the society or subdivision are impaired.

(Fritz, 1961: 655 in Lindell, 2013: 1-2)

Whilst Fritz’s definition regards a disaster as an ‘event’, modern disaster research is now moving away from this view, returning to the more classic sociological understanding of disaster as inherently social, reflecting an awareness that many physical hazards that may precipitate a disaster are not of themselves inherently disastrous (Perry, 2007). By way of example, Australian ecosystems can be described as fire-adapted (Gammage, 2011; Perry, 2007; Pyne, 1991) thus in an environmental sense, fire can be a rejuvenating force necessary to maintain healthy and vital ecosystems. Such thinking views bushfires only as a disaster when they lead to physical harm and social disruption. This shift is due to increasing recognition in more recent times of the part that human activity plays in the effects of natural disasters through social systems and interventions such as land use and planning, construction of buildings, human behaviour, farming and peri-urban interface developments (see Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, & Wisner, 1994; Cottrell, 2005; Cottrell & King, 2007; King, Gurtner, Firdaus, Harwood, & Cottrell, 2016; Mileti, 1999). There

is also a growing awareness that whilst the physical events that may precipitate a disaster cannot be eliminated, humans can nevertheless still do much to reduce their effects.

Current Australian emergency management definitions continue to reflect a sociological perspective of disaster, although with some variation. For example, Australia's peak national disaster management agency, Emergency Management Australia (through its Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience), defines a disaster in terms of social disturbance as:

A serious disruption to community life which threatens or causes death or injury in that community and/or damage to property which is beyond the day to day capacity of the prescribed statutory authorities and which requires special mobilisation and organisation of resources other than those normally available to those authorities.

(AIDR, 2017:12)

Consistent with the current emphasis in disaster research, this thesis uses the term 'disaster event' to refer to the physical triggering hazard that precipitates a major social disruption (in this case the 2009 bushfires) and the term 'disaster' to encompass overwhelming environmental and social consequences of such an unrestrained physical hazard.

By way of clarification, the idea that disasters are defined predominantly by the scale of their impact on human communities is stressed frequently. Phillips (2009), in line with Drabek (2010) and Quarantelli (1988), maintains that "for a disaster to occur, it must have a human impact that disrupts community functioning" (p 19). However, I note that disasters should not only be measured in terms of human impact, but also and perhaps equally importantly, they should be measured in terms of environmental cost,<sup>20</sup> although that is not the focus of this thesis.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, in the 2006-07 Victorian Alpine bushfires 1.15 million hectares of forest was destroyed. Whilst the human impact was relatively small (as the fires were almost exclusively contained within the remote mountainous alpine area) the environmental impact was substantial. It was a disaster nevertheless, both by Brown's (2007) definition and by impact. Millions of tons of timber were destroyed; innumerable amounts of flora and numbers of fauna perished and millions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> were released into the atmosphere (Wahlquist, 2009). Surely this too is a disaster for ecosystems and thus for humanity.

The effects of a disaster event upon humanity are widely acknowledged, often causing death, injury, anguish, pain, misery, loss and grief. While the tangible loss of life, injury and damage to property and the natural environment are amongst the more easily visible effects, recognition of the importance, depth and long duration of the less visible and intangible psycho-social effects has grown over the last two decades, and as such are gathering greater research attention.<sup>21</sup>

In one widely cited meta-study, Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz and Kaniasty, (2002) reviewed two decades' worth of research on the mental health effects of disasters. Norris concluded that of the more than 60,000 people who had experienced some 80 different disasters (62% of which were natural disasters), 74% displayed specific psychological problems, 65% displayed symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), 37% displayed depression or a major depressive disorder, while 19% displayed anxiety or Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). However, whilst Norris noted that most affected people improved over time, their recovery was not always linear. Some improved for a while, then stabilised, regressed or worsened, and then improved once more. In addition, Norris found that the severity of symptoms in the early stages of disaster recovery were not a good predictor of symptoms in later recovery. Finally, a minority of communities and a minority of individuals within those communities remained substantially impaired in the longer term.

The work of Norris, et al., (2002) was confirmed again by Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty and La Greca (2010), showing that such mental health consequences of disaster events are firmly evident in Australia. In their study of the 2003 Canberra bushfires, Camilleri, Healy, McDonald, Nicholls, Sykes, Winkworth and Woodward, (2007) suggest that individual negative effects can continue for some people for a long period. Winkworth (a fellow researcher in Camilleri's study) also wrote separately in 2007 that:

Three years after the fire in which 4 people died and 500 homes were lost, a considerable number of people reported deterioration of their everyday lives, and ongoing health and psychological problems related to the bushfire. In the

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<sup>21</sup> Whilst it is acknowledged that the psycho-social effects are the most severe for disaster survivors, it should be acknowledged that first responders are also affected, and even members of the general public not directly involved with the disaster may experience vicarious trauma (Allen, 2005; Leon, 2004; Palm, Polusny & Follette, 2004).

presence of a high level of exposure to the fire and losses, it appears that a large proportion of bushfire affected individuals are still experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and psychological distress.

(Winkworth, 2007: 23)

In addition to individual mental health effects, it is also acknowledged that disasters are traumatic at the collective social systems level as well. For example, Myers (1994) explains that:

Disaster disrupts nearly all activities of daily living and the connections they entail. People may relocate to temporary housing away from their neighbours, and other social supports such as church, clinics, childcare or recreation programs. Work may be disrupted or lost due to business failure, loss of tools, or a worker's inability to concentrate due to disaster stress. For children, there may be a loss of friends and school relationships due to relocation. Fatigue and irritability can increase family conflict and undermine family relationships and ties.

(Myers, 1994: 2)

Gordon (2013b) further describes the trauma of what he refers to as the social disconnection or “debonding” that “accompanies a profound disruption of the pre-existing continuity of physical, emotional and social-life highlights” (p 11). Gordon suggests that a new “survival-oriented” system forms – the “previous social system is redefined by the event” and “roles are improvised and defined by immediate tasks” (p 11-12).

It is the realm of individual and collective psycho-social components of disaster, as described above by Norris, Camilleri, Winkworth, Myers, Gordon and many others, that are the foci of this thesis. In particular, the thesis focuses on elements that have to date received little research attention, but were sharply revealed to me through my own experience as both survivor and insider to be central in terms of individual and collective disaster recovery. These are attachment, loss and grief.

The concept and role of attachment behaviour in people's experiences of disaster is introduced and explored later in this chapter as the underlying conceptual framework

for this thesis. However, to date the existing disaster research has largely under-emphasised the importance of attachment, loss and grief behaviours in disaster response and recovery. This seems surprising given what would appear to be an obvious connection with the experience of loss in a disaster and particularly in relation to the loss of life. As Harms, Block, Gallagher, Gibbs, Bryant, Lusher, Richardson, MacDougall, Baker, Sinnott, Ireton, Forbes, Kellett, and Waters, (2015) recently acknowledged, there remains “limited understanding of some of the psychosocial dimensions, particularly relating to grief and bereavement” (p 171). In general, research on the psycho-social effects of disaster has focused on experiences of trauma and the occurrence of PTSD (for example: Arikian, Stopa, Carnelley, & Karl, 2015; Escolás, Arata-Maiers, Hildebrandt, Maiers, Mason, & Baker, 2012; Gallagher, et al., 2016; Harms, 2015; Harms, et al., 2015; Hobfoll, Watson, Bell, Bryant, Brymer, Friedman, Friedman, Gersons, de Jong, Layne, Maguen, Neria, Norwood, Pynoos, Reissman, Ruzek, Shalev, Solomon, Steinberg, & Ursano, 2007; O’Connor & Elklit, 2008; Yet the wide field of loss and grief literature in other contexts outside of the disaster research milieu shows recovery from other normal loss and grief experiences to be vitally important to both individual and collective recovery and wellbeing into the future. We must ask why this has been absent in the disaster literature for so long.

As Harms et al., (2015) note, the failure to adequately recognise and understand disaster survivors’ sense of loss and their ensuing grief and bereavement can lead to recovery interventions by governments and others that are ineffective, perhaps counter-productive and even damaging to surviving individuals and communities. As we shall see later in this thesis, such inappropriate and ill-considered interventions can unnecessarily deepen the stress, anger and trauma experienced by survivors. In addition, it can further impede the capacity of people to engage with the recovery process and move their lives and communities towards any form of new normality that may slowly emerge post-disaster. Further, as explored later in this chapter and thesis, the role of attachments and attachment figures should not be underestimated. As Masten and Obradović (2008) note, “All planning for disaster must account for the attachment system and how such relationships are likely to motivate behavior and provide for a sense of security” (p 16). As seen later in the thesis, the intensity of many people’s post-disaster loss and grief response depends very much upon their many and varied attachment relationships.

I have above established what constitutes a disaster, acknowledged the important psycho-social effects of disaster events for survivors and others, and established the need for greater understanding of, and regard for, experiences of attachment, loss and grief in a disaster context. I now consider ways that communities overwhelmed by disaster are assisted, of how approaches to providing such assistance are changing, and the implications for the way disaster response and recovery, and in particular, psycho-social recovery, is conceived and undertaken.

### **Disaster Management: The ‘Chaos, Command and Control’ Model**

Disaster response in Australia and internationally depends to a considerable extent upon certain cultural assumptions, social constructions and historical context. In the West, disaster management is underpinned by particular values, expectations, government policies and historical legacies. Looking through the lens of popular culture in the past, disasters have been seen as creating widespread chaos wherein the public panics and becomes irrational, disorganised and anti-social in their behaviour – such is the stuff of Hollywood. Whilst these popular cultural beliefs are now widely debunked as myths, they persist as underlying beliefs upon which Western disaster management approaches have been predicated for quite some time (see Drabek, 2010: 43ff.; Dynes, 1990: 6; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1972; Tierney, 2003). The apparent solution to this assumed dilemma of *chaos* was to exert strong external (para-military) *command* which “requires extraordinary measures to be put in place” (Dynes, 1990: 6) thereby taking *control* so that disorganisation can be reduced and normality regained.<sup>22</sup> Within this model, the emergency services may be seen as “‘rescuers’ and residents as passively waiting to be ‘rescued’” (Ingham and Redshaw, 2017: 56) and in which community members are positioned as “passive receivers of goods and services” (Krolik, 2013: 45). This approach can be contrasted with third-world countries where disasters are often seen as just a part of the natural order. In those countries command, control and restriction responses are often minimal, reflecting scant resources, and where survivors are often left to their own devices by way of first

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the motivation behind the persistence of this model is so that first responders themselves can better cope with managing the disaster, rather than being confronted with and having to deal with the mental, emotional, psychological and physical challenges of ‘chaos’ that may otherwise result. Perhaps the present system benefits the responders rather than the victims and survivors.

response, recovery and rebuilding which can become a protracted process taking many years to accomplish.<sup>23</sup>

In the Western world, since the post-war era, disaster management has rested within a Chaos, Command and Control model with its origins in a military style aimed at ‘combating the enemy’, such as uncontrolled fire or roiling floods (Dynes, 1990: 2. See also Krolik, 2013; Quarantelli, 2000: 8ff.). So what were the roots of this model? According to Dynes (1990: 2-3) when post-World War II America saw the threat of Russian (nuclear) attack and the advent of the Cold War, the 1950 Civil Defense Act was proclaimed to, “provide a system of civil defence for the protection of life and property” (p 3). It was believed that those who were best placed to carry out such a civil defence program were those with a military background, as military organisations are able to “deal effectively with threatening situations” (p 2). Civilians were seen as inept to deal with emergencies, so para-military structures were established and populated by a surplus of recently de-mobbed US World War II servicemen to enable the implementation of the civil defence program. As the Cold War threat diminished, the civil defence organisations became more concerned with other local emergencies. However, over time, the para-military structure became firmly embedded within civil defence and remained so.

Australia adopted a similar para-military model during the post-war period (Britton, 2002; Krolik, 2013). Like Krolik, (2013), in the terms prescribed by the para-military model, Scolobig, Prior, Schröter, Jörin and Patt, (2015), note that, “responsibility rests almost exclusively on organisational shoulders and the public is perceived as a passive receiver” (p 203). The legacy of this apex-management command and control model remains evident in contemporary emergency management in Australia,<sup>24</sup> which continues to prioritise primary emergency response capability. It also remains evident in the structure and culture of fire-fighting agencies in Australia, North America and elsewhere. These agencies (and Brigades) remain very hierarchical with Commissioners, Commanders, Captains and Lieutenants, (and in the USA, Battalion Commanders, Ladder Companies and Platoons). The uniforms (both Dress and

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<sup>23</sup> It could be argued that each approach has both advantages and disadvantages. It would be an interesting study to examine the long-term happiness and contentment outcomes of disaster survivors in both first-world and third-world countries, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>24</sup> Within Australia, the term ‘emergency management’ is synonymous with, and sometimes used in place of, ‘disaster management’.

Operational) are military in style, with rank insignia, along with identifying sleeve and shoulder flashes, name badges and service medals. Brigades have fleets of ‘battle-ready’ trucks and fire-fighting equipment. In Australia, Griffiths’ (2012) bemoans the use of our “military metaphors” (p 47) such as ‘war room’, ‘bombing’, ‘retreating’ and the elevation of ordinary people to hero status for their part in staying and fighting the battle. The appearance, language and structure of our fire-fighting and emergency management services (also encompassing state police, ambulance and state emergency services) remain irredeemably military.

In stark contrast to the Chaos, Command and Control model, and with the realisation that the population is now too numerous and widely spread to be protected by its thinly-resourced emergency services ‘army’, authorities at Federal, State or Territory and Local Government levels now accept that the “hierarchical model ... is at odds with the participatory action model of the community sector” (Ingham & Redshaw, 2017: 56). Governments are now advocating community-focused “resilience-based” approaches to disaster preparation and management, underpinned by a principle of “shared responsibility” between government and communities (COAG,<sup>25</sup> 2011: iii).

This new concept has its roots in an earlier shift to a risk-based approach in the 1990s that brought relatively greater attention to proactive endeavours alongside the predominantly reactive and response focus (Britton, 2002; Cronstedt, 2002). Krolik noted in 2013 that this change related to two international shifts: first, a move towards a community development or human rights-based focus amongst the international development community, and secondly, a growing recognition in the disaster management field that local community members can and should (because of the size of the problem and paucity of resources) play a more vital role in both disaster response and recovery (p 45). Within Australia, and partly inspired by the outcomes of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, this shift has more recently been recast at a policy level through the adoption of a resilience-based approach that emphasises community resilience as a priority, and that “achieving increased disaster resilience is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies; rather, it is a shared responsibility across the whole of society.” (COAG, 2011: 3).

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<sup>25</sup> COAG: Council of Australian Governments, the Commonwealth peak intergovernmental forum comprising all Australian States and Territories. It meets at regular intervals. [www.coag.gov.au](http://www.coag.gov.au)

Further, Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner,<sup>26</sup> Craig Lapsley (2016), wrote a paper entitled "The Six 'C's" where he has emphasised a move away from the traditional Command, Control and Coordination model to now embrace and include Consequence, Communication and Community Connection.<sup>27</sup> This is a welcome move that begins to show a change in the way emergency management interacts with communities; however, is this shift in policy rhetoric enough of itself to bring about substantial change in both culture and action? As Krolik (2013) notes, the emergency and disaster management sector in Australia continues to wrestle with the tensions that currently exist between its command and control history and culture, growing expectations in policy and research, and the community's apparent desire for an increasing resilience-based and people-oriented approach in practice. Under this very different paradigm, more collaborative and networked models based upon relationships and partnerships are required; these may be starkly juxtaposed against the prevailing models rooted in hierarchy and central control (Bosomworth, Owen, & Curnin, 2016). As Scolobig, et al., (2015) acknowledge in the broader context of Western disaster management:

There have been moves away from this top-down 'command and control' style of DRM [*disaster risk management*] to approaches that are 'people centred' and include, among others, increased stakeholder participation, responsibility shifts from the authorities to the public, greater transparency in risk/uncertainty communication, and social/institutional capacity building.

(Scolobig, et al., 2015: 203)

However, that said, Scolobig et al., (2015) also note that "local involvement in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) has not progressed in the kind of trajectory envisioned in international DRM frameworks" (p 209). It would appear there yet remains a long way to go. Sharing responsibility between governments and communities also means sharing power and control. Despite the growing emphasis on community-based recovery approaches in research and policy, the emergency management sector as a whole seems to find such a paradigm-shift challenging and remains very wary about relinquishing control, and thus real responsibility, to affected

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner has legislative oversight for all of the state's emergency services capacity, including all fire services, the State Emergency Service, ambulance services and police, and for disaster recovery.

<sup>27</sup> Which incidentally happens to be seven 'Cs'.

communities<sup>28</sup> (see Ingham & Redshaw, 2017: 56 & 61). The implications of this tension between services and the Marysville community constitute one of the key underlying themes explored in this thesis.

## **Elements of Recovery**

In Australia, disaster ‘recovery’ has been defined in a way that distinguishes it from disaster ‘response’ and the former has been centred on the role of government rather than on the experiences of the affected people and communities. Disaster (or emergency) *response* is defined as “actions taken in anticipation of, during, and immediately after an emergency to ensure that its effects are minimised, and that people affected are given immediate relief and support” (COAG, 2011: 22). By contrast, emergency *recovery* is defined as “the coordinated process of supporting emergency-affected communities in reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing” (COAG, 2011: 22). The recovery process thus begins when the response phase ends, after the immediate threat to life and property is over and clean-up and reconstruction work commences.

Within this existing model, successful recovery is often portrayed as the fastest possible restoration of previous conditions (Ingram, Franco, Rumbaitis del Rio, & Khazai, 2006). It is not surprising then to find that longer-term recovery has been relatively neglected in both research and practice (Rubin, 2009; see also MSC, 2017: p 59). However, a more sociological understanding of disaster recovery in terms of its broader and longer-term consequences, combined with recognition of the profound and potentially much longer-term psychological consequences of disasters, compels us to question the existing framework for understanding, planning and undertaking recovery. As this thesis will demonstrate, there are inadequacies in the existing models, and, in sharp contrast to those existing models, more recent disaster recovery research increasingly shows recovery to be a gradual and much longer-term and non-linear process of slowly moving towards a new existence. In the new paradigm words

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<sup>28</sup> This may be changing, however, as indicated by the release of Emergency Management Victoria’s recent 2017 Discussion Paper where the concept of ‘resilient recovery’ is enunciated in some detail as being an inclusive new systems policy approach embracing cooperation between government, communities and individuals (EMV, 2017a: 10).

like 'closure', so often used by media commentators and 'experts', have very little, if any, validity in the actual process (Tierney & Oliver-Smith, 2012).

In fact, survivors need to re-engage with a world which has for the most part been irretrievably transformed by their disaster experience (Stroebe & Schut, 2001) and as Tierney and Oliver-Smith (2012) note, recovery is therefore better thought of as "an adaptive process that negotiates the tensions between re-establishment of pre-disaster systems and significant alteration of those systems" (p 127). This view of recovery therefore focuses much more on the journey and experiences of those affected by the disaster. This broader, longer-term and more realistic view of recovery provides a much more solid foundation for examining the psycho-social effects of disasters and thus is the paradigm adopted for this thesis.

With that in mind, and in critiquing past research on disaster recovery, Tierney and Oliver-Smith (2012) found that social recovery was overly equated with the physical recovery of infrastructure and property, and there was an assumption that recovery was linear and progressed in chronological phases (see also Berke, Kartez, & Wenger, 1993). They also found that research underemphasised broader social contexts and changes within which recovery is embedded. Tierney and Oliver-Smith (2012) highlight the notion that recovery does not occur in a social and political vacuum. They describe four sets of factors that are important to consider in disaster recovery, being: pre-disaster conditions and trends; disaster impacts; post-impact responses; and post-disaster conditions that affect longer-term recovery. Given the focus of this thesis is people's post-disaster experiences, the influence of post-impact responses and post-disaster conditions that affect long-term recovery are particularly pertinent.

Further, Tierney and Oliver-Smith (2012) emphasize that the "failure to launch an effective initial disaster response can negatively affect the pace of social recovery" (p 130) and that post-impact responses should contribute towards "individual, group and community functioning" (p 130). However, unmet expectations about post-impact responses amongst disaster-affected communities can lead to individual and collective anger and social disruption that may undermine, complicate or delay recovery. As Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2010) contend, "in a post-disaster context, the

expectations that people have about the behaviour of their neighbours and their governments can profoundly affect the recovery strategies they adopt” (p 258).

Thus a wide range of factors that affect long-term recovery can be identified, leading to its complexity as a process. Importantly, there is also a nascent awareness of the psycho-social effects for disaster survivors that can accrue from the recovery experience itself in addition to the effects of the disaster event. This has been referred to by some as the ‘second disaster’<sup>29</sup> (eg: Myers, 1994; Ogilvie, 2013). As Myers (1994) explains:

The process of obtaining temporary housing, replacing belongings, getting permits to rebuild, applying for government assistance, seeking insurance reimbursement and acquiring help from private or voluntary agencies is often fraught with rules, red tape, hassles, delays and disappointment. People often establish ties to bureaucracies to get aid they can get nowhere else. However, the organizational style of the aid-giving bureaucracies is often too impersonal for victims in the emotion-charged aftermath of the disaster ... [*and*] ... to complicate the matter, disasters and their special circumstances often foul up the bureaucratic procedures even of organizations established to handle disaster. Families are forced to deal with organizations that seem or are impersonal, inefficient, and inept.

(Myers, 1994: p 28-29)

Meanwhile, Gordon notes that his definition of the ‘second disaster’ can occur at two levels, with both individuals, and the community. At the individual level, Gordon observes that:

The risk is that they devote themselves so fully to the hard work [*of rebuilding*] that they neglect the rest of their lives, and that’s often where what is sometimes called the ‘second disaster’ happens ... [*which is*] ... things like, having lost their house in the first disaster for instance, they find a year or two later their

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<sup>29</sup> The term ‘second disaster’ is also used more specifically in the context of immediate disaster relief, referring to communities and relief organisations being overwhelmed with goods and volunteers to a point where such donations and volunteers become unmanageable and constitute a problem (a ‘disaster’) in their own right, (see: Brown, 2016; Fessler, 2013; Islam, Dolan, Heggestuen, Nordenson & Vande Vate, 2013; McKay, n.d.). By way of example, see Figures 6.1 & 6.2 on pages 180 and 181 in Chapter Six.

health has broken down, their relationships have broken down, and their children don't speak to them anymore.

(Transcript of Gordon in Ogilvie, 2013: n.p.)

At the collective level, Gordon (2009b) argues that it is only through community-based recovery that the 'second disaster' of 'recovery' can be alleviated, noting that:

Working steadily through community-based structures and understanding the social dynamic of recovery is the only way to ensure that even the most well-intentioned assistance does not further damage the affected community and lead to the 'second disaster', which is the recovery.

(Gordon, 2009b: 13)

In accordance with the theoretical focus of previous decades upon individuals and the community, much of the disaster recovery planning literature and policy in Australia has for some time spoken of adopting a 'community development approach' to recovery that contrasts starkly with the Chaos, Command and Control model (eg: Australian Emergency Manual Series, 2003; Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, 2014; Emergency Management Australia, 1996; Hawe, 2009; Rowlands, 2013). As the Australian Emergency Manual Series publication 'Manual 29 – Community Development in Recovery from Disaster' (2003)<sup>30</sup> states on page 2:

The underlying basis of these Principles is a community development approach. Specifically, in the disaster recovery context this is defined as the empowerment of individuals and communities to manage their own recovery. Consequently, individuals and agencies involved in community development in recovery from disaster have a very clear role to support and facilitate individual and community recovery.

As this thesis explores, whilst the theory seems to be in place, there seems to be a large gap, a divergence, a dichotomy, a disconnection, between the theory and the practice of what actually happens 'on the ground'. Krolik (2013) sees the new 'rights-based approach' emphasize the need for the empowerment of individuals and

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<sup>30</sup> Note that this manual was formerly published by Emergency Management Australia, which is now aligned with the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (ADRI). The manual is currently scheduled for review.

communities and represents progress in disaster recovery thinking. Krolik observes that this change is principally being driven by positive community-inclusive developments within the international disaster response and recovery sector. There would also appear to be a growing recognition within Australia that locally-based community members can, and (because of the shortage of resources and the scope of the problem), must “play a vital role in both disaster response and recovery” (Krolik, 2013: 45). Perhaps too, as this thesis later clearly demonstrates, such change is being driven by a growing realisation that from both individual and community perspectives previous recovery efforts have not gone that well.

In this thesis I argue that much of the theoretical ideals about community-based and community-development-oriented recovery became lost in the milieu of the shock, initial chaos, scale and extent of the disaster, internal and external bureaucracy, politics, an unnecessary haste to rebuild, a lack of skilled personnel, and competing local and external interests and influences. Further, my own post-fire experiences led me to believe that there may be a large gap between idealised theory and the actual outcomes of disaster recovery policy and practice. In light of this, I consequently aim to re-embed people’s experiences of disaster recovery back into their social and political contexts, and to provide a corrective to the tendency identified by Tierney and Oliver-Smith (2012) to study recovery as if it occurs in a historical, social and political vacuum.

As this chapter has indicated, there is a large body of literature on disasters, particularly about post-disaster response, trauma and recovery. There is now also an emerging body of literature on the role of attachment theory and the various kinds of human behaviour that occurs during disaster response and recovery, particularly in relation to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), for example: Arian, et al., 2015; Escolás, et al., 2012; Gallagher, et al., 2016; Harms, 2015; Harms, et al., 2015; Hobfoll, et al., 2007; O’Connor and Elklit, 2008.

However, that said, there is little to be found in the analytical literature about post-disaster attachment behaviours expressed in forms concerning generalised loss, grief, anxiety, stress and personal suffering. So now I turn to the literature on attachment theory, asking if this literature can assist in illuminating survivors’ immediate post-

disaster experiences of loss and grief. If so, can these insights guide and inform a more effective response to major disasters and so assist in the recovery process? Perhaps if we can better understand post-disaster survivors' loss and grief attachment behaviour then we can improve post-disaster response and recovery efforts, thereby reducing short- and long-term pain for many disaster survivors. In addition, perhaps we can also better understand how to effectively manage the recovery and rebuilding of communities, thereby preventing disempowerment and in turn leading to healthier communities and less cost to government in terms of continued counselling, welfare and health services.

Although there are many ways of examining these complex issues, I propose we consider them through the lens of John Bowlby's well-known body of work about attachment and loss. Can the work of Bowlby and others help to illuminate the experience of loss and grief of people caught up in major disasters like the 2009 Marysville firestorm?

### **Attachment Theory and Behaviour**

The idea of 'attachment', or to be 'attached' to someone or something, is generally accepted terminology in the public domain. It is a broad concept, and a basic theme which is commonly and widely used. Perhaps it is even seen as just plain common sense. However, the concept and theory of 'attachment' and 'attachment behaviour' and their application as tools for understanding and treating psycho-social problems in the context of disaster recovery is a much more specific and scientific endeavour. Nevertheless, there is a broad body of attachment literature, much of it directly relevant to this thesis, which I explore here.

Attachment theory plays a central role in the experience of loss and grief (Bowlby, 1974, 1979a, 1980). To experience grief one must first experience loss. To experience loss, one must have first become 'attached' to that (object) which is lost. So what does it mean to be attached to someone or something? Amongst many definitions of attachment, Brown, (2007) defines it as "the action of fastening, joining, affixing, or attributing; the condition of being fastened" and in the context of this thesis, defines attachment as "affection, devotion: a sympathetic, friendly or romantic connection" (p 146). In addition to the descriptions identified by Brown above, the term attachment

involves emotional elements of feeling, affection, devotion, regard, sympathy, romance and friendship (see Ainsworth, 1991; Brandell & Ringel, 2007; Fraley, 2004; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hart, 2011; Mikulincer, 2008; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Yet for the purposes of this thesis, such limited definitions do not give enough detail to provide an adequate foundation for study. We must also explore the purpose that attachment behaviour serves in our lives.

As noted earlier, during the mid-to-late twentieth century, English psychologist John Bowlby developed the theory of attachment in his three-volume series on attachment, loss, separation, anger, sadness and depression. In this pioneering work, Bowlby focused mainly upon the attachment a child has for its mother and the effect upon the child when the mother is removed from the child's presence, which Bowlby's colleague Ainsworth further developed into the 'Strange Situation' assessment (Ainsworth, 1991; Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Brandell & Ringel, 2007). Attachment is a critical element of human behaviour that accompanies us throughout our lives. Bowlby (1979b) describes the nature and importance of attachment as,

... any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual ... (*and*) ... whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behaviour is held to characterise human beings from the cradle to the grave.

(Bowlby, 1979b: 129)

Hooyman and Kramer (2006) describe Bowlby's concept of attachment – the life-long connection and closeness to certain people – as a “protective biological mechanism” to “ensure the survival of the species”, derived from “a basic need for security and safety” (p 26). They further note that “adult attachment bonds are derived from the same emotional system underlying child attachment” (p 26). In emphasising the importance of attachment, Worden (2010) refers to Bowlby's conclusion that making “strong affectional bonds provides a way of understanding the strong emotional reaction when those bonds are threatened or broken” (p 13). Whilst Bowlby's work focused on parent-child relationships, more recently the combined works of Fraley, Mikulincer, Shaver and others, have focused upon adult-adult attachment relationships. Even Bowlby himself noted that:

Throughout adult life the availability of a responsive attachment figure remains the source of a person's feeling secure. All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organised as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure.

(Bowlby, 1988: 69)

The 'secure base' (a theme which Bowlby has developed in great detail<sup>31</sup>) has been referred to as a *circle of security* (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, and Powell, 2002, in Brandell and Ringel, 2007: 102) from which a child, or adult, can venture away from and into the 'big wide world', yet upon his or her return remain a place of security and safety. In this thesis I draw upon the central relationships between attachments and security to critically examine adult attachment relationships in what I refer to as 'the five Ps' – People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation (being community and lifestyle) by examining issues of loss and grief and in relation to feelings of security.

Since Bowlby's original work many others have utilised and further developed his observations, such as Ainsworth, 1991; Barton, 2010; Bretherton, 1991; Fraley and Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer, 2008; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2001; Mikulincer, Gillath and Shaver, 2002; Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde and Marris, 1991; Weiss, 1991). Amongst those who have extended Bowlby's original work are Fraley and Shaver who completed considerable research on 'adult romantic attachment theory'; Mikulincer (2008) completed work on 'attachment and grief'; Barton (2010) considered the effects of loss that non-custodial fathers experience in relation to their attachment to their children, and Mikulincer and Shaver (2014) completed a paper entitled "An attachment perspective on resilience to stress and trauma".

Indeed, Bowlby's initial concept has now become a part of a larger lexicon of human behaviour and can be applied in many ways. Nevertheless, while over time there has been some criticism of Bowlby's work (see Harris, 1998; Lakoff, 2002, [chapter 21]; Lee, 2003; Pendry, 1998) it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to enter into such discussion. Suffice it to say, attachment in all its forms is not something that humans

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<sup>31</sup> Whilst Bowlby extensively develops the idea of a 'secure base', he credits the introduction of the concept to his colleague, Mary Ainsworth (Bowlby, 1988).

consciously seek – it is just what happens to us from the time we are born and throughout our lives.

### **Beyond Bowlby – The Five Ps**

Bowlby was intensely interested in the attachment relationships we have with each other. One of the most worthwhile developments of his work has been the extension of the idea of attachment to encompass relationships with other kinds of objects. Many of our lived experiences and perceptions are tied to relationships, not only with each other, but also to our relationships with both animate and inanimate objects, the five Ps – People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation – to which it is often said that we become ‘attached’ (see for example: Belk, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Julius, et al., 2013; Keefer, Landau, & Sullivan, 2014; Kleine & Baker, 2004; Low & Altman, 1992; Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

We all generally acknowledge that we are attached to people (spouse, partner, children, family and friends) and we feel more comfortable when we see familiar faces (acquaintances and neighbours). Many people experience attachment to pets (such as cats, dogs and birds) and to other animals (livestock such as horses, cows, sheep and pigs). We are also attached to places, to particular physical surroundings and to a built environment, like home. Many of us are also attached to a particular way of life: our routines, our social life, our ‘lifestyle’. We are attached to a ‘community of place’, its people and its environs, and we are attached to a ‘community of interest’, its people and its subject matter (Fairbrother, Tyler, Hart, Mees, Phillips, Stratford, & Toh, 2013). It is these daily attachments (often subconscious) to which we rarely give a second thought that make up our everyday lives.

If then, as Bowlby (1988) argues, the purpose of attachment between People is to provide a secure base, it would seem reasonable to think that attachment to Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation as noted above will also foster a secure base. Further, while Bowlby’s attachment theory views the mother as a secure base for the child (Bowlby, 1988: 68-9), it is equally plausible that a child’s, or adult’s, home, possessions and local physical environment are also a part of that person’s ‘secure base’. Hence, extending the application of attachment theory opens up the

need to explore the influence of those factors in people's experiences of, and responses to, post-disaster loss and grief. Let us now consider in more detail the role and relevance of attachment by way of the five Ps – People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation – to disaster response and recovery.

## **People**

From an attachment perspective, People is about our family, our friends, work-place colleagues, acquaintances, regular shop staff and other familiar faces with whom we often interact (ie: not strangers). As we have seen above, relationships, home, community and environment can all play an important role in affirming or modifying an adult's experience of attachment. As with any attachment relationship, such as in a marriage as Feeney and Monin (2008) note, an attachment figure (or object) "... enhances a person's safety and security by providing a safe haven to which he or she can retreat in times of need, and a secure base from which to explore" (p 935). Safety and security can be found by many people through their attachment to their 'significant other', and in their attachment to other people. Indeed, as Feeney and Monin (2008: 934) observe, in divorce there is a corollary to the loss and grief responses that occur with the death of a loved one. I argue that this observation logically extends to the loss and grief responses that occur in a disaster, when the safety and security of one's 'secure base' is also forcibly removed.

## **Possessions**

From an attachment perspective, when referring to possessions, we are concerned with all material objects, 'things', and 'stuff', that make up the contents of our homes, garages and sheds. They include furniture, general goods and chattels, photographs, artworks, books, family heirlooms, souvenirs from our travels and general familiar objects we like to keep. By definition, possessions are anything we possess, that we can become attached to and wish to retain. It may be because of the memories associated with the item, or simply because we like it.<sup>32</sup> The concept of attachment can therefore also apply to understanding our relationships with inanimate objects. This is important because, as many writers argue and attest, most notably Belk (1988,

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<sup>32</sup> A distinction should be made here between what could be termed normal attachment behaviour towards possessions and the abnormally clinically disordered obsessive-compulsive behaviour of hoarding, which is not the subject of, nor included, in this topic.

1990, 1992, 2010), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), Curnow (2010), Keefer, et al., (2014), Miller (2008), and Tuan (1980), possessions, things and stuff play a meaningful role in most peoples lives.

We can see that the application of attachment behaviour to things, objects and stuff connects people with their memories, their past and their sense of self, hence strengthening their 'secure base'. This is especially true of photographs. Writers from a range of disciplinary perspectives, such as Belk (1988, 1990, 1992, 2010), Binay and Brace-Govan (2009), Kleine and Baker (2004), and Tuan, (1980) argue that attachment to possessions provides, *inter alia*, a sense of familiarity, bringing with it a sense of comfort, security and solace (again affirming one's secure base). As I demonstrate later in this thesis, the loss of that familiarity may bring about feelings of loss, grief, depression, and additional consequences. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's important work *The Meaning of Things* (1981) explores the relationship people have to the objects they possess, and why they possess them. They argue that objects are important primarily "in the context of family relationships" (p 241) and provide a "sign of the self's extension into the future", as "tokens of remembrance, respect and *love* ..." (p 242) and are "valued because they produce an enjoyable sensation or interaction" (p 243). They conclude,

... things can have meanings that may transform the very world in which we live. But things by themselves alone cannot help us; only the way we relate to [*or perceive*] them is their symbolic energy released.

(Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 247)

As Belk (1988, 1990, 2010) and others observe, possessions help shape, and for some even represent, our self-identity (see also: Binay & Brace-Govan, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Tuan, 1980). Indeed, possessions can help "stabilise us by reminding us of our past" (Belk, 1990: 669) and "provide continuity in one's life and across generations" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 86). Again, this is especially true regarding photographs of family and places. Belk (2010) observes that once we die and leave our possessions to be inherited by our children we provide a "link to immortality" (p 7). Belk (1988) also concludes that "it seems an inescapable fact of modern life that we learn, define, and remind ourselves of who we are by our possessions" (p 160). It is clear that

possessions can serve a definite and positive purpose in human life and development. Along with Belk, I argue that people become attached to their possessions, as possessions provide them with a clear sense of identity, of who they are in the present, of where they came from in the past, and of their personal history. As Belk notes:

A key to understanding what possessions mean is recognizing that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves.

(Belk, 1988: 139)

Similarly, Tuan (1980) agrees, noting how “our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess” (p 472). Miller (2008) also agrees, noting that “these things are not a random collection”, that they “have been gradually accumulated as an expression of that person or household” (p 2). Writers such as Gordon (2009b: 1; 2013a: 5), along with Keefer, et al., (2014: 528) also write about how material possessions, or objects, provide many people with comfort and security (a secure base). Indeed, objects of attachment may not only be the collected goods within a dwelling, but the very house (and garden) itself, representing a personal expression and investment of time, money and energy. As a result, attachment to things provides a sense of familiarity, a feeling of comfort and security, and a reminder of previous experiences and valued memories. Such objects may provide a sense of identity and a very real sense of ‘who I am’ as a person, in that these objects make up the sum total of ‘me’, and then collectively, of who ‘we’ are as people in community and society.<sup>33</sup>

In short, a possession becomes part of the self, and the longer the possession is owned, the stronger the importance of, and attachment to, that possession becomes. It then stands to reason that should such possessions be lost, especially traumatically, grief will result. In following this vein, Belk (1988) observes a “diminished sense of self when possessions are unintentionally lost or stolen” (p 139). Belk (2010) further states that “because possessions are often central to our identity, the involuntary loss of possessions to theft or disaster is often traumatic” (p 2).

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<sup>33</sup> For example, public war memorials as found scattered throughout small towns and villages.

## **Pets**

Pets are animals we have domesticated and keep (almost as possessions, and indeed, they are legally defined as such) usually at home, often indoors, and of which we have become particularly fond, attached to, and often treat as additional members of the family. Animals more generally (and again as possessions) are usually found on a farm and in larger numbers. For many farmers some of these animals may also be classed as their pets. I shall not dwell in much detail on this topic as the attachment of people to pets and animals is already self-evident and widely acknowledged (see CFA, 2013; Julius, et al., 2013; Thompson, 2013; Thompson, Every, Rainbird, Cornell, Smith, & Trigg, 2014; Trigg, Smith, & Thompson, 2015), so little case needs to be built to bolster this view. However, as Julius, et al., (2013) note, the perhaps obvious connection to attachment theory has not been readily made:

Close emotional ties between pet owners and their pets have been repeatedly described in the literature ... therefore it is surprising that the connection to attachment theory has not been made (with a few exceptions ...).

(Julius, et al., 2013: 130)

In making that connection, Julius, et al., cautiously conclude that:

There is evidence supporting the impression that humans can develop relationships to their pets ... which in general meet at least some of the criteria for secure attachment.

(Julius, et al., 2013: 132)

When it comes to disasters, attachment relationships to pets and animals have important consequences, as Trigg, et al., describe below:

Pet-owner closeness is frequently characterised as an emotional attachment akin to parental caregiving, comprising ascription of family membership to pets, anthropomorphism or animal personhood, as well as emotional support and seeing pets as a psychological safe haven for distress reduction. Under threatening conditions, anticipated loss of this relationship can provoke separation distress and motivate the risk of personal safety. Thus, when a pet's safety is not assured owners are reluctant to leave without them.

(Trigg, et al., 2015: 24-25 – their references omitted)

It is hardly surprising then that most people who feel a close attachment to their pets or other animals will do all in their power to save them when they are threatened with death. It is a normal human response, as described by Thompson:

For people who own, care for, farm, or otherwise rely on or relate to pets or animals, the desire to save them is neither misguided nor post-speciesist; it is a compelling and visceral response to a relationship that gives positive benefits to individuals, society, and humankind.

(Thompson, 2013: 125)

Emotional ties and attachment relationships between people and their pets and animals are strong. As shown graphically in **Figure 2.1** below, people have died in disasters in their attempts to save their pets and animals:



**Figure 2.1:** This burnt-out vehicle and horse float show the sometimes tragic consequences for humans when attempting to save animals in the face of a firestorm.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> **Source:** <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/esperance-fires-norwegian-anna-winter-and-briton-tom-butcher-perish-in-firestorm/news-story/0c9c4ca5325e6e02bcd6f608487fa8650>.  
Image: Mick Sonneman.

British man Tom Butcher, 31, Norwegian Anna Winther, 29, and a German woman, Julia, 19, died when their vehicle towing a horse float was caught in flames as they tried to flee the property and rescue a horse in the process.

(Paddenburg, Anderson and Hickey, 2015)

Indeed, a whole new area of disaster research into preventing human fatalities in connection to people's attachments to their pets and animals has in recent times emerged (for example, Westcott, Ronan, Bambrick, & Taylor, 2017).<sup>35</sup> There is no doubt that people are attached to their pets and animals.

### **Place (and Topophilia)**

A great deal has been written about attachment to place and its cousin, *topophilia* (literally 'love of place'). Attachment to place includes the comfort and security (a secure base) to be found in one's home, one's property, the sight of familiar people and their homes and properties, local shops, streets, roads, gardens, trees, the bush and the environment generally. All of these things constitute attachment to place, or 'place attachment' (Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2014) and the concept of 'topophilia', or 'love of place' (Betjeman, 1947; Tuan, 1974).

“‘Place’ ... is ... ‘space’ imbued with meaning” says Williams-Bruinders (2013: 52; see also Cresswell, 2004: 1-12). Williams-Bruinders continues, saying that space becomes place when “personal meanings ... become embedded in people’s memories and in community stories ... [*that*] ... can occur at individual and institutional levels ... [*and is about*] ... transforming bad places into good places”<sup>36</sup> (2013: 52). Williams-Bruinders seeks to define place “as a dynamic process rather than as a static outcome” where “individuals themselves must connect to a locality; who must develop their own attachment to place” (p 52). Once achieved, a sense of place, or love of place, is not an either-or choice; it is both a static outcome and an ongoing dynamic process (perhaps moving either positively or negatively forward). In defining attachment to place, Williams-Bruinders (2013) says it is,

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<sup>35</sup> Note too that the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, (2015) Vol. 30. No. 2. was almost entirely devoted to addressing matters of animal attachment as related to disaster preparedness and response.

<sup>36</sup> And perhaps conversely, converting ‘good’ places into ‘bad’ places.

... the sentiments/emotional ties that one holds about a particular locale, and [it] assists in the community sentiment and notions of belonging. Place attachment contributes to the individual and group cultural production through the process of attributing meaning to place and subsequently becoming attached to those meanings.

(Williams-Bruinders, 2013: 53)

The concept of 'topophilia' (the love of place) and the developmental process of 'attachment to place' are so closely tied that any argument about which comes first could be interminable as they are so intertwined. In examining more closely the relationship between topophilia, attachment and a secure base, we shall begin by examining topophilia in more detail.

Topophilia is literally defined as 'love of place' (Greek: *topos* 'place' and *philia* 'love of'). It is both idea and experience. The term was apparently first used by Auden (in Betjeman, 1947) and later redefined by Tuan (1974) who described it as including "all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment" (p 93). Tuan (1974) recognised topophilia as a complex concept that has a common emphasis across humanity in "the range, variety and intensity of the topophilic sentiment" (p 92). Closer to our own time, Ogunseitan (2005) described topophilia as "the affective bond between people and place or environmental setting" (p 143). Tuan's 'affective ties' and 'sentiment', and Ogunseitan's 'affective bonds' indicate the importance of our emotions and feelings towards a particular place. For Gibson (2009) topophilia, or 'love of place', is also a biological and cultural connection to a particular location. Tuan argues a natural connection between attachment to possessions and its logical extension to attachment to place. His useful observations on familiarity and attachment are worth quoting at length:

Familiarity breeds affection when it does not breed contempt. We are well aware of how a person can become deeply attached to old slippers that look rather mouldy to an outsider. There are various reasons for this attachment. *A man's belongings are an extension of his personality; to be deprived of them is to diminish, in his own estimation, his worth as a human being.* Clothing is the most personal of one's belongings. It is a rare adult whose sense of self does not suffer in nakedness, or who does not feel a threat to his identity when he has to

wear someone else's clothes.<sup>37</sup> *Beyond clothing, a person in the process of time invests bits of his emotional life in his home, and beyond the home in his neighborhood. To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighborhood is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world.* As some people are reluctant to part with their shapeless old coat for a new one, so some people – especially older people – are reluctant to abandon their old neighborhood for the new housing development.

(Tuan, 1974: 99 – italics added)

Here Tuan echoes Bowlby in describing what is in essence Bowlby's 'secure base'. Further, Windsor and McVey (2005) note that "place (rather than space) implies a strong emotional tie between a person and a particular location" (p 147). I would call that "emotional tie" an attachment. I also agree with Windsor and McVey (2005) that "the importance of place and a sense of place to human well-being cannot be overstated" (p 148). The concept of the secure base is also alluded to by Windsor and McVey (2005) who, in quoting Steele (1981), conclude that "place provides a 'sense of security to individuals and groups' and provides them with a 'sense of control over their own fate'" (p 148-149).

Relevant to the context of disaster in this thesis, Seamon and Sowers (2008) note that it is only in understanding and experiencing why a place is important and special that one can mend it if it gets broken, and that,

... without a thorough understanding of place as it has human significance, one would find it difficult to describe why a particular place is special and *impossible to know how to repair existing places in need of mending.*

(Seamon & Sowers, 2008: 44 – italics added)

Appreciating what it was that made Marysville so distinctive to those who lived there, and to its many regular visitors, is crucial for knowing how to reconstruct it, or to mend it, so that it regains its original appeal, and is essentially the same as it was pre-fire. The importance of this statement shall become clear later in the thesis.

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<sup>37</sup> Something experienced by many post-Black Saturday survivors.

Topophilia then is similar to ‘attachment to place’ and also relates to a ‘secure base’, (or, as Low & Altman (1992) note, “place attachment is analogous to topophilia” p 3). I would suggest that topophilia is more about a person’s connection to the physical environment, whereas ‘attachment to place’ is more about the interpersonal, the community and the social connections. I do not believe that a person’s localised experience of topophilia is of itself enough to build a sense of community. For that to occur there must be attachment as well, and attachment is a mental construction. As Read (1996) notes “homes, like other places, are mentally constructed. What we identify as ‘home’ is not only a different location from everyone else’s, it occupies a different space” (p 101). ‘Home’ in this sense has dual meanings in that not only is it the physical structure in which we live, but also the physical locality (or place) in which that home is situated; both constitute ‘home’, and a secure base from which to explore the world.

### **Participation**

Participation is about our attachment to our community (its people and places collectively) and to our way of life, our lifestyle (our social interactions, our routines, employment, hobbies, favourite coffee shops and walks, etc.). Our attachment to our community generally provides us with an added sense of safety and security. Our participation in and attachment to our community complements the attachments found with our partners, family, pets, possessions, place and home. Much has been written about attachment to community. According to Williams-Bruinders (2013) “attachment to place” is central to a sense of belonging and shared identity in any community (p 53). She notes that:

Communities provide the medium through which meanings are mediated and shared, and in doing so, also provide the context in which individuals can articulate who they are.

(Williams-Bruinders, 2013: 53)

The social nature of individual human beings includes qualities of familiarity, tolerance, reciprocity, trust and cooperation. In turn, they lay the foundations for collective human interaction which can be described as ‘community’ (common unity). Social networks and a concept of society develop from such communities from which

derive notable benefits to humanity (Bauman, 2008: 120; Blackshaw, 2010: 15 & 209; Smith, 2001: 5). This concept of community has been described by many as *social capital* (Beem, 1999; Blackshaw, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Smith, 2001; Williams-Bruinders, 2013), referring to the value placed upon individual connections within their social networks (Smith, 2001: 5).

Blackshaw (2010) notes that successful social capital is found in communities, groups and networks and involves “establishing common values, trust and cooperative ways of being and working together for mutual benefit” (p 209). Social capital has also been described as a combination of civic virtue and social responsibility (Blackshaw, 2010: 209; Williams-Bruinders, 2013: 53) which brings about an “interaction that enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric” (Beem, 1999: 20). In turn, such social interaction, networks and sense of community, or ‘social capital’, bring about a “sense of attachment” (Smith, 2001: 2 & 5). Smith then describes the commonality of community as “communion”; a sense of attachment to a locality, a group of people, or even to an idea (2001: 2). Smith cites Cohen’s argument that “belonging and attachment” play a role in creating “communities of meaning” and in “generating a sense of belonging” (2001: 2). According to Cohen (1985), “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (p 118). Smith and Cohen have described well what is often observed in the functioning of small country town communities, such as Marysville was.

Butler (2004) in writing about grief, violence and politics, suggests that as we are all “socially constituted bodies, attached to others”, that we are always at risk of “loss and vulnerability” through exposure to violence (p 20). Whilst Butler is not referring to natural disasters in her terminology of ‘violence’, her idea can nevertheless be applied to loss and grief caused by a (violent) disaster like bushfire. Butler describes Freud’s idea of ‘interchangeability’ – that if one attachment figure or object is withdrawn, then after a period of mourning, it can be exchanged for another, thus resolving the sense of loss and ensuing grief. However, Butler suggests that by mourning the loss, a person is in reality accepting or submitting to the idea that, like it or not, one will have to undergo transformative change (p 21). Butler is correct – mourning is all about accepting involuntary loss and change.

In continuing this theme, Butler argues that “when we are dispossessed from a place or a community” (p 22) we may believe it to be only temporary and that after a period of mourning and grief, things will return to much as they were before (ie: that what has gone is simply replaced by, or exchanged for, something new). Butler correctly contends that this is clearly not the case, and that after dispossession a period of confusion at both individual and community level occurs.<sup>38</sup> Butler frames this personal and collective feeling of loss and confusion well:

It is not as if an “I” exists independently over here and then simply loses a “you” over there, especially if the attachment to “you” is part of what composes who “I” am. If I lose you ... then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who “am” I without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost “you” only to discover that “I” have gone missing as well.

(Butler, 2004: 22)

Butler sums up the juxtaposition of loss, grief and mourning between the self and the community as an indivisible inter-relationship. Loss at a personal and collective level is mixed with a new question of self-identity. Attachment to community too is an ethereal concept – it is not really tangible; however, the loss of it can certainly be felt. Attachment to community shows itself through behavioural evidence, is probably fragile, can almost certainly be damaged and lost, and is difficult to recover. As this thesis discovers, Butler’s idea of dispossession from place and community, complicated by external interventions in the rebuilding process, certainly leaves its mark on individuals and the recovering community by way of diminished social capital.

As revealed in this literature review, attachment is a very broad concept that affects almost every aspect of our lives, encompassing attachment to People, to Possessions, to Pets, to Place and to Participation. Julius, et al., refer to Ainsworth’s (1991) defined criterion of a secure attachment figure as consisting of four elements:

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon, (2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) has also written and spoken extensively of this phenomenon.

- 1) The attachment figure is a reliable source of comfort and reassurance that allows for exploration (secure base).
- 2) The attachment figure is approached in the case of emotional stress in order to achieve proximity and a feeling of security (haven of safety).
- 3) The physical proximity to an attachment figure is associated with positive emotions (maintenance of proximity).
- 4) Separations from the attachment figure are associated with negative emotions (eg: missing an attachment figure, longing for the attachment figure, separation pain).

(Julius, et al., 2013: 131)

It is clear that the above four criteria can be successfully applied to any of the proposed five Ps as described above. The literature confirms there is good reason to think that experiences of attachment can equally apply to People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation, providing humans with a secure base from which to operate, and additionally providing a positive sense of self. When any one of the five Ps is lost, naturally there is grief. However, what happens when one or more of these five P's are either partially or totally lost in a disaster? It is, *inter alia*, these elements of attachment behaviour that this thesis investigates in relation to the experiences of Marysville 2009 Black Saturday bushfire survivors.

### **Attachment in Loss and Grief – Searching and Appraisal Behaviour**

If we agree the above five Ps of attachment relationships to be true, then Masten and Obradović's (2008) contention that "separation from attachment figures can cause more stress than the direct effect of the catastrophe itself" (p 16) becomes both relevant and important. Once separation occurs, elements of attachment behaviour are immediately engaged in restoring the lost attachment object through a variety of responses including fear, clinging, crying, anxiety and anger. When it is finally realised (but not necessarily accepted or resolved) that the attachment object has been permanently lost and will not be coming back (for example, a separated partner or the death of a loved one) grief is experienced with a variety of responses including withdrawal, sadness, apathy, despair and depression (Bowlby, 1988; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Worden, 2010). These responses to loss and grief over attachment figures are one element of my inquiry

through the narratives of those I have interviewed who experienced the 2009 Marysville bushfires and ensuing recovery process.

Writers such as Bowlby (1980), Hooyman and Kramer (2006), and Shaver and Fraley (2008) argue that a dramatic loss or trauma is typically followed by an initial phase of *disorganisation*. Then, over time, *reorganisation* (acceptance and resolution) occurs where “old patterns of thinking, feeling and acting” (Bowlby, 1980: 93) must be changed before the person can move ahead to the future. In this thesis I argue that similar phases can be used to understand the experiences of people who survive a disaster such as bushfire. They experience a time of fear, a feeling of needing to cling,<sup>39</sup> and to cry during that initial period. They also feel high levels of anxiety and anger. This is followed by sadness, grief, despair and disorganisation. Finally, there comes a time for reorganisation. There is no set (lineal) formula for this process of personal recovery; for every individual it is different. It may not take long at all for some, or it may take many years for others. In this thesis I also draw on the experiences of survivors to consider whether such stages or patterns of delayed recovery are evident in post-Black Saturday Marysville.

In continuing the theme of attachment and its relationship to loss and grief, there is a specific and important area of attachment behaviour that relates to expressions of loss and grief that becomes more relevant later in the thesis. It is termed ‘searching behaviour’. Searching behaviour can be broadly described as pining (separation anxiety), yearning (intense longing) and actively looking for or searching for a lost person, animal or object. Parkes (1986) describes searching behaviour as “a restless activity in which one moves towards possible locations of a lost object. The person who is searching has to select places in which to look, move towards them, and scan them” (p 66). In 1961 Bowlby reported on his studies into a range of animals – birds, dogs and primates – in relation to attachment, loss, and searching behaviour. He concluded that many animals will,

... protest at the loss of a loved object and do all in their power to seek and recover it; hostility, externally directed, is frequent; withdrawal, rejection of a potential new object, apathy and restlessness are the rule.

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<sup>39</sup> As a part of the concept of ‘clinging’, note the ‘bonding’ and ‘de-bonding’ process that Dr Rob Gordon speaks of (Gordon, 2013b).

(Bowlby, 1961, in Parkes, 1986: 61)

Bowlby (1979a) and Parkes (1986) have written extensively about how, as an element of attachment-related loss and grief behaviour, ‘searching’ plays an important part in the early stages of the acceptance and recovery process. In the well-known Kübler-Ross (1969) model of the ‘five stages of grief’ (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance<sup>40</sup>) searching behaviour forms a part of the first initial shock and denial stage, along with crying and protest (anger), (Bowlby, 1961, in Parkes 1969: 87). Searching behaviour is a part of separation anxiety and may commence immediately after the person receives news of the loss (see the Postscript on page 294). Even though the loss may be an established fact, Parkes (1969<sup>41</sup>) notes that losses,

... do not become “established fact” in the eyes of the bereaved for some time after the bereavement and until they do separation anxiety continues to be the predominant affect.

(Parkes, 1969: 87)

In other words, even though the loss may be acknowledged at one surface cognitive level, at a deeper level the disbelief that the loss has occurred persists, as do crying, searching and protest (often expressed as anger). Parkes suggests that in searching, the bereaved will, *inter alia*, restlessly move about scanning the environment, think intensely about the lost person (or object), develop a mind picture of what they are looking for, go to where they expect to find the lost person (or object), and call out for it (Parkes, 1969: 87).

Before progressing with this theme, it is worth noting that, in addition to Bowlby and Parkes, whilst some other loss and grief authors have also observed an immediate post-loss phase of yearning, pining and searching for a lost figure (eg: Clark, 2006; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Sharma, 2016; Worden, 2010) most loss and grief authors neglect to mention these behaviours at all. Perhaps they are unaware of their importance? Further, within the disaster management literature as noted earlier in this

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<sup>40</sup> Note that whilst in 1969 Kübler-Ross’s ‘five stages of grief’ provided a basic framework for understanding loss and grief, they are today acknowledged as being only a part of a much more complex and involved grieving process.

<sup>41</sup> Note that Parkes (1969) is the earlier scientific paper that much of Parkes (1986 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn. First published in 1972) is based upon.

chapter, the idea of 'searching behaviour' as related to attachment theory is entirely absent.

Bowlby himself wrote comprehensively of the connection between attachment theory and the process of loss and grief (1974, 1979a, 1979b, 1980) which includes descriptions of searching behaviours. Indeed, Bowlby, (1979b) says "the bereaved is seized by an urge to search for and to recover the lost figure. Sometimes the person is conscious of the urge, though often he is not" (p 103). It is important to note that the lost figure may not necessarily be a person, but may also be an object or an animal. It is also pertinent that the bereaved may not be conscious of the searching urge. By way of connection to the origins of Bowlby's attachment theory it is useful to note Sharma's observation about its persistence into adulthood:

The foundations for yearning, searching, looking, and trying to recover the lost person are laid in the first two to three years, when a child becomes intensely attached to his mother and zealously guards her presence. He makes sure that she is near him at all times and if she has to leave momentarily, that she gets back soon. Loss in adulthood activates the early attachment behaviour. Separation from mother throws a child in to disbelief and protest against the loss and the child furiously searches for the lost parent. An adult also reacts to the loss with disbelief and protests against the lost person for not being there.

(Sharma, 2016: 1)

In building upon attachment theory, Parkes (1986) came to similar conclusions as Bowlby and has written in detail on the subject of searching behaviour. He notes that "the desire for attachment figures persists as does the desire for a safe and familiar environment" (p 64). In view of the persistence of the desire to maintain the attachment, Parkes notes that searching for a dead person or pet (or a known-to-be permanently lost object) is clearly irrational but maintains that "this does not prevent him from experiencing a strong impulse to search" (p 64). Parkes states that whilst for grieving people "searching behaviour is quite manifest", he adds that "the majority of the bereaved people I have studied were not consciously aware of the need to search" (p 65-66). Parkes concludes that for searching behaviour to persist the bereaved person must (intentionally yet subconsciously) "disregard that fact that the dead person [or object] is permanently lost" (p 91-92). This is why much searching

behaviour goes unrecognised – it remains in the subconscious. As Parkes succinctly notes:

The problem here is that the objects are gone and the individuals want them back. Reality-testing tells them that this is impossible. But immediate acceptance of this would involve a major change in their identity or rather a host of major changes in their identity, and ... this takes time.

(Parkes, 1986: 92)

It would seem clear that most people involved in searching behaviour are not aware of it. Perhaps such behaviour is actually psychologically ‘playing for time’ – for the mind to emotionally adjust to recognising and accepting the loss. Parkes raises another element of searching behaviour in that,

... although we tend to think of searching in terms of the motor act of restless movement toward possible locations of the lost object, searching also has perceptual and ideational components ... signs of the object can be identified only by reference to memories of the object as it was.

(Parkes, 1969: 88)

This is very true. Survivors searching for lost possessions amongst the rubble have a very clear picture in their mind of what the object they are searching for looks like. Parkes (1969) notes that many bereaved people seem to be restless and aimless in their immediate post-loss grieving activity; however, he maintains that such behaviour is anything but aimless, noting that “what they want is to find the lost person” (p 67) or animal or object. To be prevented from doing so will clearly cause heightened anxiety and distress, and Parkes notes that at the same time there is “a painful lack of capacity to initiate and maintain normal patterns of activity” (p 88). This suggests that should searching behaviour be delayed, so too would be the ability to resume normal patterns of activity.

Whilst Parkes (1986) further suggests that “the searching that follows bereavement is a form of facilitative behaviour whose function is the recovery of the lost object” (p 92), he also notes that “it is clear ... that the behaviour does not eliminate pain or anxiety, but in fact prolongs it” (p 92). Indeed, Parkes goes on to say that a lack of

success in searching behaviour often leads to frustration and that when searching behaviour is frustrated, “there results an increase in the intensity and persistence of that behaviour” (p 77). Frustration increases anxiety and anger, and may lengthen the duration of searching behaviour. Other typical responses to searching frustration may include stress, depression, giving up, loss of confidence and self-esteem, suicidal ideation, drug abuse, and other addictive behaviours including eating and weight problems (see also Barton, 2010). The above-listed responses to frustrated searching behaviour can be intense and, as we shall later see, were often observed in many Marysville 2009 Black Saturday bushfire survivors.

It would appear that until the loss can be personally substantiated, a “newly bereaved person is rarely able to accept, in full, the reality of what has happened” (Parkes, 1986: 93). As we shall see later in the thesis, searching behaviour was not able to even begin for six weeks until after the lock-out was lifted, and was then further interrupted by the Grocon clean-up process. The denial of access to their homes clearly prevented many survivors from exercising their searching behaviour and this later showed as a damaging long-term effect for many.

According to Parkes (1986), bereaved people “continue to act, in many ways, as if the lost person [*or object*] were still recoverable and to worry about the loss by going over it in their mind” (p 93). In 1917, Freud termed this activity ‘grief work’. We must ask what happens if people are prevented or delayed in doing such work. Parkes notes that for people engaged in Freud’s grief work there is “a conscious need to ‘get it right’ ... and to ‘make sense’ of what has happened, to explain it, to classify it” (p 93) and that such activity often involves repeatedly recalling the events that led up to the loss.<sup>42</sup> In further speaking of Freud’s grief work, Parkes (1986) says, “each memory that bound the survivor to the lost object must be ‘hypercathected’. By this he [*Freud*] means that ‘energy’ must be used to sever the link with the lost object and therefore set free the energy that is bound up with it (cathexis)” (p 94). In that context, Parkes and Freud both use the term ‘object’ in relation to a person. I use that term in relation to all of the five Ps as described earlier. While there has been much critique of Freud’s concepts of cathexis and hypercathexis, there remains little doubt that a good deal of

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<sup>42</sup> Hence the constant discussion and reliving of the events leading up to the disaster (or trauma) that may well be a topic of conversation amongst survivors for even years after the actual traumatic event occurred.

mental energy (however defined) is required to set oneself free of the attachments one has towards any or all of the five Ps that have suddenly ceased to exist.

In addition to searching behaviour, Parkes (1986) refers to another concurrent phase of the early grief process known as 'appraisal'. He notes that,

... appraisal of a trauma normally enables people to establish in their minds, as realistically as possible, the true external situation so that they can make appropriate plans to cope with it. If they find themselves with no suitable plans for dealing with the fresh situation it may be that they will be unable to complete the process of appraisal. They may find themselves repeating the chain of memories again and again ...

(Parkes, 1986: 95)

Immediately post-trauma, Parkes is of the view that "when the mind is occupied with so important a task, [*as appraisal and searching behaviour*] it cannot easily concentrate on another. The total preoccupation with the business of searching leaves no room for other interests" and so "being alert, restless and preoccupied, and set to find the lost person, the griever directs attention to those parts of the environment that are most closely associated with that person [*or object*]" (1986: 70). Clearly, for the traumatised, the tasks of appraisal and searching behaviour can be all-consuming. Later in the thesis I contend that is precisely what the Marysville lock-out did to many people. It prevented the process of appraisal; it prevented searching behaviour, and it prevented people from commencing or completing many elements of grief work. Indeed, as Parkes has noted, "intense yearning ... in the early weeks of bereavement predicted chronic grieving later" (p 143). The immediate post-fire blocking of the appraisal process and the prevention of searching behaviour may well be a predictor of later chronic grieving, and indeed, that is what I found both within myself, and with those I later interviewed.

Following on from the initial shock of the trauma, and closely connected to it, pining, yearning and searching behaviour may be the initial response to loss. Perhaps, as we have seen, appraisal and searching behaviours can aid in moderating the initial intense pain of the loss. It would seem the brain plays a trick on the bereaved person, thinking that the loss has not actually occurred and that in reality, everything is still as it was,

(see pages 180-186 in Chapter Six). Perhaps it is too difficult for the brain to actually acknowledge and accommodate that such a huge loss has really taken place. This is especially the case with a sudden loss (such as a car crash or a natural disaster), as opposed to an expected loss (such as a long-term cancer illness). Usually the appraisal and searching phase is short-lived, but may persist for longer if initially blocked or delayed as was seen in post-fire Marysville.

Bowlby and Parkes are not the only ones to describe searching behaviour. Whilst most references to it are written in relation to the loss of a loved one, there is no reason that such behaviour cannot be rephrased to refer to at least elements of all of the five Ps. Clark (2006) speaks of certain aspects of searching behaviour whereby a person may be,

... linking objects that help the grieving person feel connected ... Perhaps it was a clothing item that was frequently worn, or a possession such as a necklace or ring that had special meaning ... The items may vary, but the idea is the same — that the items help to keep a person linked to the loved one who is gone. This, too, is normal grieving behavior, and the need for the linking object will decrease over time.

(Clark, 2006: 1)

This behaviour is experienced by many disaster survivors. In addition, rather than an item or possession “helping to keep a person linked to the loved one who is gone”, the bereaved may search for an object simply because of that item’s intrinsic value to the bereaved person. Certainly, the bereaved may search for family heirlooms that remind of a parent, relative or friend who is deceased, but the bereaved may also search for an object of their own that reminds them of, for example, a previous relationship, an earlier career, or a holiday taken many years ago.

As we saw earlier, Sharma (2016) also connects Bowlby’s attachment theory to searching behaviour. He notes that as the bereaved person or survivor “begins to realise that the lost person [*or object*] is not there, the survivor begins to yearn” (p 1) and,

... the numbness and stupor are replaced with a state of high alertness and vigilance. This change is not without a purpose. The intensely active state of body and mind is designed for searching for the loved one, who is not yet perceived as permanently lost, but, simply being away, out of sight. Realization of death comes much later when the mind can grasp the reality of the permanent loss.

(Sharma, 2016: 1)

Clearly it takes time to process an enormous loss. Searching behaviour assists with the time required to integrate the loss into the bereaved person's new reality. Hooyman and Kramer (2006) have suggested that "losses are conceptualised as turning points that may become growth points, but only if the pain is worked through by releasing emotions of grief" (p 39). As we shall see in Chapter Five, the protracted lock-out denied survivors access to their properties. Then, through the detached clean-up process, once people were able to access their properties they found them to be not as they left them and further damaged. Perhaps through these actions the authorities prevented grieving residents from necessary psychological and emotional human appraisal, searching and grieving behaviours and in so doing, delayed the release of emotions thereby also delaying the process of grief, growth and recovery for many. As Sharma puts it,

... there should be some amount of searching behavior, at least for some of the time after the initial shock and numbing is over. If searching goes on indefinitely without any signs of abatement, it may mean that grief is not progressing in a normal fashion.

(Sharma, 2016: 1)

Perhaps Sharma might also agree that if appraisal and searching behaviours are prohibited or delayed then that too, as noted above, may mean that "grief is not progressing in a normal fashion".

To conclude, appraisal and searching behaviour is likely to be subconscious. Therefore, in disaster response and recovery research it is likely to be very difficult for researchers to recognise or identify the existence of appraisal and searching behaviour unless they have personally experienced it or until a tool is developed to

detect and recognise it. This is one of the benefits (and I use that word loosely) of being an insider who has personally experienced post-disaster appraisal and searching behaviour. Outsiders, and specifically researchers conducting interviews of disaster-affected people, are not likely to identify this aspect of behaviour as they are unlikely to have ever experienced it themselves, and there is nothing about it in any existing literature. Therefore, they would not know to ask about appraisal and searching behaviour, and interviewees are unlikely to volunteer information about their own appraisal and searching behaviour as for them it has mostly occurred subconsciously; they were unaware of it and so the uncomfortable feeling passes unrecognised. Perhaps the last word here should go to Parkes, who concludes that a bereaved adult has,

... the same need to go through the painful business of pining and searching if he is to 'unlearn' his attachment to a lost person [*or object*].

(Parkes, 1969: 92)

### ***Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT)***

Bereaved adult appraisal and searching behaviours demonstrate that attachment behaviour is, as Bowlby said, 'from the cradle to the grave' and is every bit as applicable in adulthood as it is to young children. It is clear that attachment behaviour is ingrained and cannot easily be discarded. I believe that appraisal and searching behaviours take on a new special significance post-disaster, as we shall see later in this thesis. I contend that delays in people being able to carry out such appraisal and searching behaviours may prove harmful to their longer-term recovery.

On the basis of my experiences, interviews, research and analysis, I now have my own definition of a 'second disaster' and I have given it a name. It is what I shall in future refer to as '*Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma*' (PDAT). This is a new terminology which describes the post-disaster anxiety, stress and trauma experienced by disaster survivors that is directly related to the disruption of innate attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour that seemingly all humans exhibit. Hence, Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma is a new term I have coined that is not found in any literature to date. My definition is:

*The occurrence of external post-disaster events (over which disaster survivors have little or no control) which when combined with the normal spontaneous human expressions of loss and grief innate to human attachment behaviour produces a disruption to the natural processing of human loss and grief responses, particularly in relation to initial appraisal and searching behaviours, thereby resulting in further trauma which exacerbates stress, anger, grief, frustration and anxiety, which may then delay and complicate grieving and recovery.*

For those individually and collectively affected by post-disaster events that are beyond their control and that interfere with their normal (attachment-based) processing of grief and loss, a second disaster is experienced. I further contend that when ordinary human Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma responses are combined with other post-disaster recovery events that may also prove to be traumatic and frustrating, this too may lead and contribute to disempowerment, individual and collective depression, longer-term mental health issues, suicidal ideation and, as we shall see later in Chapter Seven, to solastalgia.

## **Chapter Summary – Tying it all together**

Marysville 2009 bushfire survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief have potentially revealed some gaps in the response and recovery process. My own post-fire experiences, and the experiences of those I have interviewed, seem to confirm such a view. It would appear that poorly managed post-disaster responses can result in a range of variously described 'second disasters'. Further, the effects of current practices of the Chaos, Command and Control model of disaster management and recovery may have deleterious effects upon survivors in relation to normal loss and grief attachment behaviour which may lead to the disempowerment of individuals and communities in both the response and recovery phases of disaster management. This indicates a lack of understanding by disaster managers of the role that normal loss, grief and attachment behaviour plays in disaster response and recovery, and a very real gap between the two.

We have seen that over the last five decades various facets of Bowlby's attachment theory have been very well developed by others in relation to the multiple inter-

connected attachments of the five Ps – People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation. However, any application of attachment-related loss and grief behaviour concerning disaster response and recovery is only in its infancy. I have also considered the matter of searching and appraisal behaviour as being of vital importance to post-disaster response and recovery. As a result, I have coined the term *Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma* (PDAT) to describe how certain post-disaster response and recovery efforts can disrupt and delay normal loss and grief attachment behaviours.

From an attachment perspective, there would appear to be a lack of knowledge or understanding in the literature about what survivors are experiencing immediately after a disaster and of how best to respond. It is acknowledged that a second disaster, the disaster of recovery, can exacerbate negative recovery experiences for many survivors. I contend that Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma may result from dysfunctional disaster response and recovery efforts. As we shall see later in the thesis, this issue looms problematically large in the authorities' response to the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the ensuing response, recovery and rebuilding efforts.

This is important because if post-disaster survivors' loss- and grief-related attachment behaviour can be better understood, then we can improve disaster response and recovery, thereby reducing both short- and long-term pain for many survivors. In addition, we can better understand how to effectively manage the recovery and rebuilding of communities, thereby preventing disempowerment and, in turn, leading to healthier communities and less cost to government in terms of ongoing counselling, welfare, and health services.

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## Chapter Three: *Methods*

*We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are.*

(Original Author Unknown)

I vividly recall in the weeks following the Black Saturday fires saying to many people in Marysville, “Someone’s got to document all this; someone’s got to record what’s going on here”. I suggested to various people that perhaps we could apply for a grant to get a writer to come to town and tell our story. That general concept was accepted by many, but no one was interested in doing it and, as with many things, the idea fell by the way. Nevertheless, I was determined to do something about what I and others were experiencing all about us after the fire. Fortunately, in late 2010 through a chain of curious events too detailed to explain here, and having just completed a Master of Arts by thesis, I was offered a PhD scholarship by both RMIT University and the then Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre<sup>43</sup> to undertake just such a project – to investigate what had happened, and was still happening, in Marysville.

In early 2011 the project began. As I embarked upon the daunting yet rewarding exploration of the literature I also needed to work out what method would be most effective and appropriate, and give credence to underpinning the work. Initially I intended to simply use a phenomenological approach, conduct a fairly standard range of interviews and see what turned up.

My Confirmation of Candidature seminar was scheduled for late 2011. By that time I had determined the method would be a mix of qualitative ethnographic autobiographical study utilising naturalistic inquiry, inductive grounded theory and inductive data analysis; in hindsight a rather naïve combination. At the Confirmation of Candidature seminar one of the panel members spoke most favourably about my intriguing project, but was quite critical of the proposed methodology. He was of the view, which I eventually accepted, that because of my own personal deep involvement in the Black Saturday fire and its aftermath that I really needed to use the technique of autoethnography. I had never heard of it before.

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<sup>43</sup> Now the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC).

As I was soon to discover, one of the real struggles of this thesis has been to grasp the nettle of autoethnography and to utilise it in both its evocative and analytical forms, and yet at the same time produce a high-quality piece of academic research that would be suitable as a PhD thesis. This was by no means easy and there were many times during the last six years that I wished I had never heard of autoethnography. However, in the end autoethnography and I came to understand each other and learned to work together. This chapter is about how my working relationship with autoethnography intertwined with other methods to construct the thesis.

If research into the effects of large scale disasters on people is to be of value, then we need research that is able to shed fresh light on the experience of trauma. As McFarlane and Raphael (2009) put it:

Future studies should build on what we already know, rather than simply replicating what has been studied before. Research that makes demands on people who are suffering has no role if it is not innovative.

(McFarlane & Raphael, 2009: 291)

What McFarlane and Raphael are saying is that any research that “makes demands on people who are suffering” must be justifiable in terms of beneficial outcomes because of the emotional cost such intrusions impose. That is, we have no right to exacerbate people’s suffering because we are interested in their experiences if that intervention is not going to produce something that is of great value. I agree wholeheartedly. My research makes those kinds of demands upon people who are suffering, and in particular, myself and those I interviewed in our community. Yet from what I discovered, those intrusions actually proved cathartic for my interviewees and did not activate any resurgent trauma for them.

The research involved in this thesis is valuable and innovative. It provides fresh insights into the experiences of bushfire survivors. It combines phenomenological, ethnographic and autoethnographic methods to develop ways of finding out what happens to people affected by major traumatic disasters. And, with a view to building on what is already known, this research extends that knowledge in new ways.

In the previous chapter I indicated there are several key problems with much of the research and literature regarding post-disaster experiences. There are gaps related to what I have now called *Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma*, that is, the additional trauma people experience during their recovery due to a disruption of normal attachment behaviour associated with blocked appraisal and searching needs as a part of processing loss and grief.

If we are to make sense of the human experience of trauma that is central to this thesis, then we need to access the experiences of those people most directly affected by the Black Saturday fires, and the meanings that can be attributed to those experiences. To do this we need a method that pays attention to the narratives shaping survivors' conception of self, and how those stories helped them evaluate and make sense of their experiences (Orbe, 2009: 750).

I chose to work within a qualitative research framework because I value the phenomenological approach. As Patton (2002) notes, it enables a focus on the “inter-subjective” (p 106) dimensions of human experience, stressing the shared nature of how we know and make sense of the world. In addition, a combination of ethnography and autoethnography will best realise the aims of a phenomenological approach. This is so, given that the thesis aims to give voice to those whose experiences would otherwise remain undocumented, my own included. I begin by sketching the provenance and essence of the phenomenological tradition. I then outline the key elements of ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, and my particular use of these methods.

## **Phenomenology, Ontology, and the Nature of Experience**

Humans are equipped with cognition: the capacity to know and the ability to perceive.<sup>44</sup> By means of our senses we perceive things around us and can become aware, recognise, discern and understand.<sup>45</sup> We experience our environment, our world, and the actions of others. We observe, encounter and undergo experiences. Things also happen to us – so it is a two-way process. All this can be referred to as

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<sup>44</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cognition?s=t>

<sup>45</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/perceive?s=t>

lived experience. Having lived experiences, we gain life experience,<sup>46</sup> which then provides each person with certain “knowledge and practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered, or undergone”.<sup>47</sup> This is unique to each human being. However, there are many instances whereby the lived experiences of many people overlap, producing similar perceptions, knowledge, understanding and practical wisdom. This is sometimes referred to as common sense, and is usually accepted by all without deeper examination. In this thesis, what may be accepted as common experience, common sense, or common wisdom, is one of the subjects of inquiry.

By way of background to phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely acknowledged as its originator (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). His work *Logical Investigations* (1900 & 1901) is considered foundational (Husserl, 1901; Sokolowski, 2000: 2). Husserl, and those who have since built upon his work, note that phenomenology is “the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (Sokolowski, 2000: 2).

Through this ontology, Husserl (1901) sought to identify a “*correlation* between objectivity and subjectivity” and wanted to “analyse the intentional subject matter of *expressive experiences* where ‘expression’ is understood as the articulating of meaning” (p xxiv). Husserl’s focus was “on the ideal sense of the objective intention” and his aim was to “broaden the sources of intuition further than previous philosophies had allowed, and clarify the fundamental relation of thought to truth” (p xxv). Husserl’s “first philosophy or *phenomenology*” was “aimed at the careful description of all forms of making *meaning* and registering *meaningfulness* and hence the whole domain of subjectivity” (p xxvi). To sum up, Husserl’s phenomenology seeks a connection between subjective experiences and the objective, and, through intuition, to bring conscious thought into truth thereby making meaning out of the subjective.

My research draws on the phenomenological approach, introduced into mainstream American sociology in the 1950s by Alfred Schütz (1967)<sup>48</sup> and then extended in the

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<sup>46</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/experience?s=t>

<sup>47</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/experience?s=t>

<sup>48</sup> First published in German in 1932 as *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (literally, ‘The meaningful construction of the social world’ and published in English in 1967 as ‘The phenomenology of the social world: studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy’.

late 1960s by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1967). Berger and Luckman conceived their phenomenology of the life world in terms of “the social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 27). They treat every day as living in the ‘life world’ (*Lebenswelt*) as the consequence of our inter-subjective interpretations rendering that ‘life world’ subjectively meaningful as a coherent world which becomes taken for granted, (their) ‘reality’. This shared reality has its origins in, and is maintained by, the thoughts and actions of human beings (1967: 33) where life is generally ordered around rules and social expectations – of what becomes ‘normal’ life. However, all rules and expectations can be disrupted by a disaster, and social reality shattered by the loss of what was normal. For this reason, social reality can only be *inter-subjective*. As Berger and Luckmann conclude, if human reality is a “socially constructed reality” (p 211), then the study of this reality cannot be undertaken by sociologists in the way physical or natural scientists might do, involving a mixture of empirical and quantitative methods, while also claiming to be “value-free” (1967: 211). Stanley (1993) agrees, “the self” (thoughts and feelings) are also “socially produced and understood” (p 50).

On this account, social scientists working in this framework are not striving for a hard social realism so much as an empirically grounded appreciation of the kind of insights that are expressed by people working from a shared understanding of their social world. As Fine (2001) puts it:

Objectivity is an illusion – an illusion snuggled in the comforting blanket of positivism – that the world is ultimately knowable and secure. Alas, the world is always known from a perspective, even though we might agree that often perspectives do not vary dramatically.

(Fine, 2001: 380)

The aim of phenomenological, ethnographic and autoethnographic research is to elucidate the experiences of others as well as the researcher’s own experience. The challenge of such research is to decide how a relevant conception of ‘truth’ can be applied and tested. As such, Husserl, (in Sarantakos, 1993) regards people not as passive recipients of “forces” within an objective world, but as “active creators of their world, and have a consciousness that communicates to them in everyday experiences and knowledge” (p 47). Husserl observed that phenomenologists do not

reject the existence of the objective world, but rather that it is experienced through one's consciousness (Miguens, 2002; Patton, 2002: 107; Sarantakos, 1993: 47). Spiegelberg reiterates this point, saying how phenomenology is,

... based on the intuitive exploration and faithful description of the phenomena within the context of the world of our lived experience (*Lebenswelt*), anxious to avoid reductionist oversimplifications and overcomplications by preconceived theoretical patterns. ... Its ultimate objective is the examination and justification of all our beliefs, both ordinary and scientific, by the test of intuitive perception.

(Spiegelberg, 1960: 64)

Many elements of phenomenology are pertinent to this thesis. Orbe, (2009), notes that in the field of phenomenology it is not possible to carry out objective research; it is subjective work, and as such, researchers focus on what he terms "conscious experience" (p 751), rather than favouring more traditional data (such as statistics). In gathering conscious experience, Orbe sees phenomenology as focusing on the discovery of human experience. For this reason, phenomenology includes broader and deeper methods of data collection oriented towards understanding the human experience and how that relates to human behaviour. The collection of such rich information leads to what Geertz (1973) has described as his "thick description" (p 6) of human experience; the discovery and documentation of the minutiae of a person's experience that provides the best opportunities for interpretation and for understanding what meanings people attribute to events and how they make sense of the world around them.

A phenomenological approach means "there is no separate (or objective) reality for people" (Patton, 2002: 106). To reiterate, it is this essence of individual and shared experience I explore in this thesis. It is a study that "focuses on descriptions of *what* people experience and *how* they experience what they experience" (Patton, 2002: 107 – italics added).

## **Descriptive and Interpretative Phenomenology**

Descriptive and interpretative phenomenology is an appropriate prism through which to view this research. Spiegelberg, (1975) identified a method of phenomenology he

calls 'descriptive phenomenology' which involves "direct exploration, analysis and description of particular phenomena" (p 57). Descriptive phenomenology occurs in three stages. *Intuiting*, where the researcher is fully immersed in the phenomena investigated; *analysing*, where the researcher reflects on the collected information, identifying the emerging essence and common themes of the phenomena investigated, and *describing*, being the writing and communicating of critical elements of the phenomena into classifications or groups, and without prematurely describing the phenomena.

Descriptive phenomenology seeks to avoid assumptions and describes a phenomenon in pure form prior to corrupting influences, beliefs, understandings, prejudices and attitudes. Theoretically, as Tuohy, et al., (2013) note, this can be achieved via "bracketing out" (p 18) unwanted influences to achieve objectivity. I ask, however, whether it is possible to 'bracket out' such prior knowledge and influences, because to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not requires the application of invented criteria applied according to the reasoning of one or more persons, guided by their subjective concerns. Interpretative phenomenology may provide a solution to this.

Interpretative phenomenology, also known as 'hermeneutics', is used to describe, understand and interpret experiences of "being in the world" (Tuohy, et al., 2013: 18). While some argue the practice of 'bracketing' cannot apply to interpretative phenomenology (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009), nevertheless, the prior understandings, knowledge and experience of the researcher (known as 'fore-structure') may in fact assist in the researcher's interpretations. For example, Finlay (2008) is of the view that if researchers recognise prior influences, beliefs, understandings, prejudices and attitudes rather than deny them, they can be more open to new findings and meanings. This is a kind of "bracketing" whereby a "pre-understanding" of the self is the first step of "pre-reflective" interpretation (Tuohy, et al., 2013: 19). The goal of interpretative phenomenology then, is to explore lived experience including that of the researcher, and to acknowledge that all experiences are "linked to social, cultural and political contexts" (Flood, 2010, in Tuohy, et al., 2013: 19).

According to McCance and McIlfatrick (2008, in Touhy, et al., 2013) “the researcher is ‘considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomena under investigation’, and this must be acknowledged and integrated into the research findings” (p 19). Flood (2010, in Touhy, et al., 2013) agrees, noting that “researchers cannot rid themselves of what they know or think” (p 19). This explains why it is appropriate for autoethnography to be used in tandem with phenomenology. As Tuohy, et al., (2013) conclude, “an interpretive phenomenological approach is suitable for research that aims to understand and interpret participants’ experiences, to determine the meaning of the experiences” (p 20), which is what this thesis seeks to do.

On the question of ‘evidence’ in phenomenology, Sokolowski (2000) observes it is more about what is evident to people, rather than pure objective evidence. The distinction may appear slight, but is important in phenomenological research. As Sokolowski notes,

... “evidence” takes on the sense of the verbal form, “evidencing”. It is the bringing about of truth, the bringing forth of a presence. ... Evidence is the activity of presenting an identity in a manifold, the articulation of a state of affairs, or the verification of a proposition. It is the achieving of truth. ... Evidence is the successful presentation of an intelligible object, the successful presentation of something whose truth becomes manifest in the evidencing itself.

(Sokolowski, 2000: 160)

Sokolowski’s (2000) ‘self-evidencing’ proposition sits well with Spiegelberg’s (1960) ‘test of intuitive perception’ and also reflects Husserl’s (1901) connection between subjective experiences and the objective through intuition thereby bringing conscious thought into truth and making meaning out of the subjective (p xxvi). And so the evidence presents itself, as Sokolowski concludes:

Such presentation is a notable event in the life of reason. It is the moment when something enters into the space of reasons, the world of intelligibilities. ... the object is manifested and known, it discloses itself. Its truth is actualized. It is evidenced.

(Sokolowski, 2000: 160)

According to Sokolowski (2000) phenomenology is 'evidenced' in two ways: "in the truth of correctness and in the truth of disclosure" (p 162). When this is achieved, we see that "these are all facts, intelligible objects, and we register them as true: we display them in their intelligibility. They are understandings" (p 162). Sokolowski observes three levels of structural 'evidence' in phenomenology. First, there are the "syntactic combinations that yield *meaningful* propositions" (p 169); secondly, the next level "is related to the *consistency* of propositions" (p 170), and thirdly, "the content of what we say" deals with "the *coherence* of the statements we make" (p 170). This is about propositional statements that are meaningful, consistent and coherent.

Dennett (1991) further divides phenomenology into two parts: *auto-phenomenology*, that is, a "first-person introspective knowledge of contents of consciousness, taken (by the subject) to be infallible" (p 354) which Dennett contends is "not yet ready for use in cognitive science", and *hetero-phenomenology*, which "takes the subject's auto-phenomenology for its face value" and attempts to "justify a method for relating first-person descriptions with natural science" and with "third-persons" and "other data" (p 354). As we shall see below, this is akin to autoethnography, moving from the purely autoethnographic towards a more analytical autoethnography. Dennett's interpretation of phenomenology, and extension into *auto-phenomenology*, show clear parallels between phenomenology and autoethnography, and thus lends further weight to the approach taken in this thesis.

To conclude, phenomenology is appropriate for this thesis because, as Merriam (2009) says, it is "well suited for studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (p 26).

## **Ethnography**

Between phenomenology and autoethnography sits ethnography. The term is derived from the Greek words *ethnos* meaning "a nation, people or culture", and *grapho*, "to write" (Brown, 2007: 870). Ethnography involves writing about nations, people-groups and their culture, at times combining all three. Brown describes ethnography

as “the scientific description of races and peoples with their customs, habits and mutual differences” (2007: 870).

Into the twentieth century, ethnography developed as a model for social research, considering such things as the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on villages and small towns (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 1). The ‘Chicago School’ sociological approach was interested in “allowing narrative material to lead the researcher” (Merrill & West, 2009: 22). Their approach, which used interviews, the study of face-to-face interactions, life histories and case studies (Deegan, 2001: 12; Merrill & West, 2009: 24-26), was developed in the 1930s by ‘symbolic interactionists’. Ethnography became “a descriptive narrative portraying social worlds experienced in everyday life within a modern, often urban, context” (Short, 1971, cited in Deegan, 2001: 11). In this regard, Geertz’s summary of ethnography is worth quoting at length:

In anthropology, or anyway social anthropology, what the practitioners do is ethnography. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly what doing ethnography is, that a start can be made toward grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description”.

(Geertz, 1973: 5-6)

Geertz makes the task of the ethnographer clear:

The point for now is only that ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with ... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render.

(Geertz, 1973: 9-10)

As Mansvelt and Berg (2005) observe, Geertz's 'thick description' can "take the reader to the centre of an experience, event or action, providing an in-depth study of the context and the reasons, intentions, understandings, and motivation that surround that experience or occurrence ... an understanding of 'the heart of the matter'" (p 260).

One aim of ethnography is to afford the opportunity to those who have not been heard to speak about their experiences. In so doing, ethnographers can challenge existing hegemonies and contest dominant discourses, meanings and established views (Blommaert, 2015). This thesis provides 'insider' accounts that challenge orthodox epistemological approaches and questions dominant assumptions and practices. It challenges the common views held about disaster recovery and specifically those practices as were applied by the authorities in Marysville after Black Saturday. In this thesis, through interviews, deep reflection, member checking, literature matching and intuitive interpretation of what seems to be sub-conscious, I get to the heart of people's responses to Black Saturday.

## **Ethnographic Methods**

While it is agreed that phenomenology is concerned with examining the lived experiences of people, there seems a reluctance amongst those writing on the subject to detail precisely how such examination should be done. Groenewald (2004: 6) notes that neither Holloway (1997) nor Hycner (1999) "focus too much on specific steps" to be taken when using a phenomenological approach. The more explicitly articulated research methods of ethnography may help resolve such reluctance.

Conventional ethnographic methods are well established through fieldwork, including primary and secondary information and data gathering, the sourcing and analysis of individual and group interviews, documents, (newspapers, magazines, NGO<sup>49</sup> and government reports), photographs and audio and visual material (Angrosino, 2007; Bailey, 2007; Berg, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hay, 2005; Holloway, 1997; Isaac & Michael, 1997; McLeod, 1994; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Pink, 2007; Prill-Brett, 2011; Scott & Usher, 1999). Some of these methods are relevant to this

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<sup>49</sup> Non-Government Organisations.

thesis and are discussed below. Ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches and data analysis are discussed later in this chapter. For now, we consider the main ethnographic techniques applicable to this thesis.

### **Fieldwork**

Ethnographic fieldwork normally requires the researcher to reside in the community under study in a field setting. The fieldworker, with the agreement of the community, may observe and participate in the activities of the community and observe behaviour and interactions. Usually the taking of extensive field notes is a part of such practice (including photographs and audio and video recordings) (Prill-Brett, 2011: 10). For me, this was not difficult as I was a resident in Marysville pre-fire and was already well-known and accepted by many people. In late 2012, some 20 months after I had commenced the research project, I returned to live in Marysville. During those first 20 months I travelled to Marysville almost weekly to commence my fieldwork and interviews.

### **Participant Observation**

Once established in the field the researcher is usually at liberty to commence participant observation where the researcher “shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study” (Prill-Brett, 2011: 10) with a view to gaining insights from an insider perspective. In reality, it is doubtful if such a perspective can ever be achieved. Participant observation may also involve attendance at notable cultural or community events as what Prill-Brett (2011) describes as a “complete observer”, just as an observer, or as a participant, or as a “complete participant”, and fully involved (Prill-Brett, 2011: 10). At any community meetings I attended as a participant-observer, I clearly stated that I may have a conflict of interest, being both participant and observer-researcher. In all cases my dual role was accepted by the meeting and I was permitted to fully participate and take research field notes.

### **Interviews**

As we see later in this chapter, interviews are perhaps the most important tool for phenomenological and ethnographic research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011); they

have been used extensively in this thesis. Interviews allow the researcher to explore other people's thoughts and combine listening, observing, and probing to find out about their experiences and to better understand the meanings they attribute to them (Dunn, 2005: 79ff.; Prill-Brett, 2011: 12; Thomas, 2011: 162ff.).

### **Key Informants (Gatekeepers)**

Key informants (also known as 'gatekeepers') are, writes Prill-Brett (2011), "the knowledgeable persons who are considered as authorities pertaining to the history and culture of the community/institution/place" (p 10). It is often to these people that a researcher refers to gain approval to attend certain events or to meet other key people in the community. Researchers may face problems if they cannot gain approval from key informants and gatekeepers, as that may block their access to key people and information. This was not an issue for me, being one of the community gatekeepers myself.

### **Relevant Documents**

Relevant documents can include a myriad of written materials such as newspapers, magazines, government and NGO reports and speeches (which I collected and examined) (Prill-Brett, 2011: 15-16; Thomas, 2011: 164). It is important to be selective in what is gathered so the quantum of material is manageable and relevant to the research questions. In this thesis I used documents to complement other information sources, to verify what interviewees said about government and NGOs, and what government and NGOs said about the community

### **Use of Photographs**

Photographs are useful in giving readers a sense of the location. However, while photographs document aspects of what is there at any given moment, they can also be used to give a selective perspective by using a specific angle, and in so doing include or exclude other perspectives. Nevertheless, photographs provide evidence to help communicate the main storyline. They can be used to express and provoke emotions (Pink, 2007: 48-49; Prill-Brett, 2011: 18-20), and they can be used for analysis to compare and to document change. For these reasons, I use photographs extensively in this thesis.

## **Use of Audio and Visual Material**

Audio recordings and visual images (radio, tapes, CDs, television, films, videos, DVDs, news broadcasts) may also play a part in ethnographic research. Like photographs, they provide a snapshot in time and provide missing information that interviewees may be unable to recall (Pink, 2007: 96ff. & 179ff.; Prill-Brett, 2011: 18-20). However, audio and visual material is usually made from the perspective of the producer so researchers should be aware of agendas that may be inherent in the material used. In researching this thesis, I studied numerous bushfire and disaster-related DVDs and television programs. They provided some historical background which proved useful for better understanding the emotional and psychological position of some bushfire survivors and interviewees. I have provided some hyperlinks and references to audio and visual material used in developing this thesis.

## **Artefacts**

Artefacts play an important if not somewhat neglected part in ethnographic research (Tuan, 1980). In this research, artefacts were important as many of the interviewees spoke at length about various possessions they lost, and about how they searched amongst the rubble for certain items; many wanted to show me what they had found. Artefacts are important for people's stories about their pre-disaster lives, and for the new meaning the burnt remains now assume.

## **Case Studies**

According to Thomas (2011: 3), a "case study" is to "concentrate on one thing in detail", and as such one cannot "generalise from it" (see also Stake, 1994; Yin, 2009). Case studies are often used as specific-instance detailed examples in a larger body of work. I elected not to undertake any specific case studies in this thesis, unless one sees the entire thesis as a case study of the town of Marysville, and while this may be argued, it is not the intent of this project. The only element of the thesis that may resemble case studies are some vignettes that may be described as mini case studies.

## **Focus Groups**

I originally decided to utilise "focus groups" (Thomas, 2011: 164) as a part of the research, but eventually decided against it. As sociologist Richards (2012), put it:

“focus groups are neither focused, nor groups.”<sup>50</sup> I concur. Focus groups are an unnatural gathering of often unconnected people whereby some talk more than others, some influence the views of others, and some may say very little and not share what they really think. All of these disadvantages outweigh any possible advantages. However, these disadvantages do not apply to individual interviews where in the comfort of their own home interviewees are more likely to feel inclined to share what they really think. I tested the idea of focus groups with a few Marysville people and they were reluctant to participate. I concluded that focus groups were not a good idea as many of the research topics were too personal and sensitive to be discussed in the company of others.

## **The Interviews**

As noted above, interviews provide an “in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics” (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillman-Healy, 1997: 121). “The interviews conducted and conversations held in the research for this thesis provide an important ethnographic resource. How then to choose who to interview and what type of ‘sampling’ to use – theoretical, random, purposeful, extreme or deviant, typical case, snowballing (or chain), opportunistic, convenience, (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2005; Denscombe, 2007).

Given who was still present in the district, the interview selection criteria were essentially opportunistic. Participants were not selected on the basis they may or may not have held similar views to me, or had similar experiences. They were selected on the basis that they were there at the time; they had direct experience of the fires and they had a story to tell that could shed light upon what had happened. In addition, some people self-selected; they heard about what I was doing and asked to be interviewed. A snowballing approach also produced a few good leads, but not many. There were some I regarded as too emotionally fragile to interview, and hence I did not approach them. However, as Newman, Risch, and Kassam-Adams (2006) suggest:

Evidence thus far suggests that there is a low likelihood of significant emotional harm from participating in trauma-focused studies. It appears that while unexpected distress does occur for some participants, this distress is tolerable and in fact linked with positive outcomes for most.

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<sup>50</sup> Adjunct Professor Lyn Richards, RMIT University ‘Focus Group Seminar’, 7/8/2012.

(Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006: 36)

Regarding the sample size, the 2011 Census population of the Marysville town area was 223 people (ABS, 2011). I compiled a list of 146 possible interviewees from Marysville, which equated to some 65.5% of the then population. I knew all these people personally before the fire, or knew of them, or had met them after the fire. All had been directly affected by the fire and had a story to tell. A population count conducted by some local town residents in 2015 put the Marysville population then at about 340 people, and the 2016 Census now puts the Marysville population at 394.<sup>51</sup> Today my list of 146 people equates to about 37% of the 2016 population, so remains a more than adequate sample size.

Logistical and time constraints prevented interviewing all 146 people. Over a period of two years and two months, from October, 2011, until December, 2013, I interviewed 83 people at varying levels of depth and intensity as indicated below. Of these interviewees 68 resided in Marysville and the remaining 15 resided in the nearby district. I met with some interviewees a number of times to clarify certain points. In all cases, and in accordance with ethics requirements, every person interviewed and participating in the research was advised that I was undertaking a PhD project. Their informed consent was requested for information gathered to be used in the research, and in all cases consent was given.

The interview questions were based upon the research questions and therefore exploratory in nature and broad-based to capture a range of aspects of the Black Saturday bushfire survivors' experiences. The 'Interview Question Pro-forma' was trialled with some Marysville friends, resulting in some minor changes. The Ethics Application, including the Interview Question Pro-forma, was submitted for RMIT Ethics approval, which was received in September, 2011, with interviews commencing in October, 2011.

In keeping with the autoethnographic intent of the project, I was also interviewed by a trusted friend using my own Interview Question Pro-forma, so I know what it felt like to be on the receiving end of my own questions. This technique of being one of the

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<sup>51</sup> **Source:** *Alexandra & Eildon Standard*, 5/7/2017, p 7.

respondents interviewed in my own research “allowed my personal experiences to become valid data” which then “freed me to write reflectively, thoughtfully and introspectively about a very personal subject” (as noted by Smith, 2005: 6, and quoted in Taber, 2010: 13), so the use of this technique is not unique.

Regarding the identities of those interviewed or spoken to, in most cases it is not possible to give any descriptors of them without the risk of their being identified. For this reason, no descriptors are given other than gender and approximate age. Out of 18 in-depth interviews conducted, 16 interviewees agreed for their identities to be revealed and two did not. However, I am of the view that it would be in the best interests of all interviewees for them to, as far as possible, remain anonymous as there may be unintended consequences of revealing their thoughts and opinions publicly. For this reason, I use fictitious names. Notwithstanding that, some interviewees specifically agreed that their real names may be used, and that has occurred later in the thesis.

None of the interviews was alike. In the main, people with intensive and extensive experiences of the fires and the aftermath had a great deal more information to share. They provided longer formal interviews and all were transcribed. In other cases, people with less contact or experience of the fire itself, and of the aftermath of response and recovery, had less to contribute, so their interviews were shorter and not transcribed.<sup>52</sup> With that in mind, there were six categories of interview depth and intensity, the classification of which are as follows:

### **1) Local formal, structured in-depth and tape-recorded interviews:**

These interviews followed the format of the Ethics-approved Interview Question Pro-forma (see **Appendix B**<sup>53</sup>). The interviews ranged in duration from approximately 90 minutes to over three hours spread over two days. Eighteen recorded in-depth interviews were held and were transcribed.

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<sup>52</sup> As noted earlier, all interviewees found the interviews cathartic and were not re-traumatised by the interview process. Many thanked me after the interview for the opportunity to talk about their experiences, especially with someone who was there at the time and who really did understand what they had been through.

<sup>53</sup> Note that the Research Questions were revised during the course of the project and hence are now not the same as the Research Questions referred to in the Interview Pro-forma at Appendix B.

**2) Local semi-formal, unstructured non-recorded interviews:**

These interviews followed a similar format to the Interview Question Pro-forma. They were, however, abbreviated to focus upon specific-issue areas of interest and were usually 60 minutes or less. Sixteen such interviews were held, and field notes were taken.

**3) Local informal interviews and conversations:**

These interviews or conversations were open-ended and followed no set order or pattern. They were largely dictated by the interviewee's wish to talk when prompted by some broad discussion-starter questions. People I knew often self-selected to be a part of such interviews. Approximately forty-two of these conversations were held in various locations over a four-year period, and I also took field notes at the time.

**4) Formal, structured tape-recorded interviews with Government officials:**

During the course of the research, two formal, structured and in-depth interviews were held with government officials. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and focused upon their role and observations as State Government employees during the initial three-year Marysville region recovery period.

**5) Semi-formal, structured non-recorded interviews with Government officials:**

Later in the research, four less-formal and unstructured interviews of government officials were held. Those interviews also focused upon their role and observations as State Government employees during the later four-year recovery period. I also took field notes of the interviews.

**6) Informal interviews and conversations with Government officials:**

One informal conversation with a government official was held to discuss elements of the economic recovery of Marysville over the later four-year recovery period. Field notes were made of that interview.

**Details of Interviews**

There were a total of 83 interviews. All participants consented to be interviewed and all knew that the interviews were a part of my PhD research project. **Table 3.1** below

provides a snapshot of the circumstances of the interviewees. More detailed information regarding the particulars of the interviewees follows after the Table.

<b>Interview Type → Details ↓</b>	<b>Formal Local Interview</b>	<b>Semi-Formal Local Interview</b>	<b>Informal Local Interview</b>	<b>Formal Govt. Interview</b>	<b>Semi-formal Govt. Interview</b>	<b>Informal Govt. Interview</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Total No. Interviewed</b>	18	16	42	2	4	1	83
<b>Male</b>	10	7	19	2	2	1	41
<b>Female</b>	8	9	23	-	2	-	42
<b>Couples</b>	4	3	15	-	-	-	22
<b>Pre-fire Resident</b>	16	13	39	-	-	-	68
<b>Lost a Family Member</b>	1	2	-	-	-	-	3
<b>Lost Home</b>	16	7	26	-	-	-	49
<b>Didn't Lose Home</b>	2	9	16	2	4	1	34
<b>Lost Business</b>	10	7	17	-	-	-	34
<b>Lost Employment</b>	11	7	20	-	-	-	38
<b>Retired</b>	3	1	4	-	-	-	8
<b>Resides Outside Of Marysville</b>	2	3	3	2	4	1	15

**Table 3.1:** Details and statistics of the interviews carried out.

Of those interviewed, many had very traumatic experiences of the fires. Three interviewees lost members of their family who died in the fire (five deaths in total); another suffered a permanent debilitating physical injury (resulting in numerous operations); three were suffering from cancer at the time of interview (all three have since died), and another four have recently contracted cancer and have undergone treatment. All of those interviewed lost friends in the fire; many lost much loved pets and all suffered varying degrees of lasting emotional and psychological injury, with possibly up to at least 16 suffering from diagnosable Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Most have sought counselling.

The above represents a cross-section of the immediate post-fire Marysville community. There are a balanced number of males, females and couples. Some lost family members, and most lost their homes, businesses and employment. Some were retired and some, either from before the fires or since, reside outside of Marysville. Different types of interviews were held depending upon the breadth and depth of

people's experiences. Whilst the research was intended to focus primarily on the local town survivors of Black Saturday, it was also important to gain the perspective of at least a few government officials involved in the recovery process. This was done by interviewing seven Government officials. It is worth noting that no interviewed government official's home, business or employment was lost as a result of the fires.

**Formal Interviews:** Eighteen local formal structured in-depth and tape-recorded interviews were completed and then transcribed. In addition, two government officials who resided outside Marysville were interviewed. Of the eighteen pre-fire residents, four are couples; ten are males and eight are females. The age range was between the mid-30s to the mid-70s. Of the eighteen formal in-depth interviews, sixteen interviewees lost their home. Of those sixteen, ten lost their businesses, and eleven lost their employment. The five who did not lose their employment were retired or employed outside of Marysville. In addition to the 542 pages of formal interview transcripts, five of the interviewees provided me with a total of a further 96 pages of their own typewritten notes about their experiences, making a total of 638 pages of manuscripts for consideration and analysis.

**Semi-formal Interviews:** Of the sixteen local semi-formal interviews, seven interviewees lost their homes, businesses and employment. Of the nine whose homes did not burn down, four were Government officials, three of whom reside outside Marysville. Two had a business that survived, one had work outside Marysville and one was retired. Of the sixteen interviewees, three are couples; seven are males and nine are females. The age range was between the late 30s to the early 80s. Extensive field notes were taken of the interviews. There were four semi-formal interviews with government officials, (two males and two females).

**Informal Interviews:** Of the forty-two informal interviewees, twenty-six lost their homes whilst sixteen did not. Of the twenty-six who lost their homes, seventeen lost their home, their business and their employment, two lost their home but not their business, one lost her home and her employment, and six others lost their homes but were retired or worked outside of Marysville. Of the sixteen who did not lose their homes, six lost shedding on their properties and two lost their employment. A further three who did not lose their homes nevertheless lost their employment, and of the

seven others who did not lose their homes, one remained employed in Marysville whilst the other six were employed outside of Marysville or subsequently retired. Of the forty-two interviewees, fifteen are couples; nineteen are males and twenty-three are females. The age range was mid 30s to early 80s. There was one informal interview with a government official. Fortunately, my own experience of the fires, and my background as a counsellor assisted in conducting and managing the interviews. I believe that people felt comfortable with me, knowing that I too had been through the fires and shared their experiences.<sup>54</sup>

### **Potential problems with interviews**

There are always difficulties when conducting interviews. Sometimes interviewees may just talk about what they think the interviewer wants to hear, but I don't think that occurred in any of my interviews; they were all genuine and honest accounts. Indeed, there was a strong sense throughout the interview process that people wanted, and indeed needed, to share their stories and get things off their chest. They were pleased with the depth of the questioning which they reported made them think about their experiences and reflect on the way they felt. There were also times in some interviews where we became a little emotional and cried together. That was difficult, yet cathartic. No one was traumatised by the interview process and all participants thanked me for the opportunity to be involved.

### **Autoethnography**

Reed-Danahay (2001) describes a type of ethnography which has adopted three prominent genres:

1. *Native anthropology*, where previously the subjects of ethnographic studies are now conducting their own research into their own peoples.
2. *Ethnic autobiography*, where a personal life story narrative is foregrounded by ethnic or cultural identity.

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<sup>54</sup> I experienced a similar reaction during my post-fire research work with the BCRC at Connelly's Marsh, Tasmania (January, 2013), and at Mt. Victoria, NSW (December, 2013), where the people I interviewed seemed to breathe a sigh of relief if I told them I was from Marysville. They could see that I understood what they were feeling. The interviews always went better and the information shared was deeper and richer.

3. *Autobiographical ethnography*, where researchers incorporate their own personal narrative into their ethnographic research.

(Reed-Danahay, 2001: 407)

As a part of the phenomenological approach, *autobiographical ethnography* is the main method used in this thesis. Reed-Danahay (2001) describes this as *autoethnography*, characterised by the foregrounding of the ethnographer with a self-narrative or self-inscription by the ethnographer (p 407; see also Merrill & West, 2009: 31). Roberts expands this concept:

As researchers we should clarify and reflect on how our life and experience before and during the research affects our activities, assumptions, interpretations and so on. Implicated here is the complexity of experience, how the researcher and the researched influence each other and collaborate in biographical exchange.

(Roberts, 2002: 87)

Autoethnography is a relatively new research method (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2001). If ethnography is a qualitative research method wherein the researcher uses participant observation, interviews and field work to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of a particular group (Ingold, 2007), then autoethnography uses the author's subjective experience, and how that relates to the experience, belief, practices and understandings of others. As Ellis says:

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)

(Ellis, 2004, in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011: para. 1)

Ellis adds ...

A reflexive<sup>55</sup> connection exists between the lives of participants and researchers that must be explored. And the relationships between the writers and readers of

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<sup>55</sup> Reflexive: means responsive; the ability to reflect; serious thought directed back on the mind, and "that takes into account ... the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated" (Brown, 2007: 2507).

the texts is one of involvement and participation.

(Ellis, 2004: 30)

Reed-Danahay (1997) refers to the autoethnographer as a “boundary-crosser” with a dual identity of researcher and research participant (in Hoppes, 2005: 79). Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that the traditional view, whereby the feelings and emotions of the researcher ought to be excluded from the research process, has now been displaced by a more interactive relationship between the researcher and the researched (p 161). However, Marcus and Cushman (1982) would like to see the “unintrusive presence of the ethnographer in the text” (p 29) by only using photographs to demonstrate to the reader that the researcher was really there. Reed-Danahay (2001) concludes that “the ethnographer is thus visually portrayed as present in the work if not explicitly signified in the writing” (p 412). Given my own experience of the fire, my presence in this research cannot be ignored and is foregrounded through the autoethnographic approach, with the researcher (me) interacting with the other people I researched (interviewed). Extensive use of photographs is made, showing my participation in the recovery, and aiding in the reader’s understanding of the research.

While acknowledging the value of recognising the researcher, problems may arise if there is too much “researcher self-disclosure” via excessive “confessional tales” or “fables of rapport” (Angrosino, 2007: 80; Clifford, 1983: 132; Reed-Danahay, 2001: 412; Van Maanen, 1988: 75). This can risk the work becoming a self-absorbed and egocentric project (Reed-Danahay, 2001: 410-412). In this kind of research there is also the risk of “realist tales” (Angrosino, 2007: 79; Van Maanen, 1988: 55) where the researcher is obscured in favour of the subjects being studied. Hence, a need for balance exists whereby scientific rigor can be maintained while acknowledging that researchers have personal involvement and (power) relationships with the people they are researching. As Okely (1996) notes, there is a need for a “more explicit recognition of fieldwork as personal experience instead of sacrificing it to a false notion of scientific objectivity” (p 27). My intention is to achieve that balance (Reed-Danahay, 2001: 412-413) and, to use Salter’s (1976) words, to achieve “a cross between the personal and the objective” (p 1).

When speaking of ethnography generally, Angrosino (2007) notes “the facts do not speak for themselves” (p 75). Some interpretation is required, with “two main forms

of data analysis: *descriptive* (the search for patterns), and *theoretical* (the search for meaning in the patterns)” (p 75). Angrosino continues, “... patterns may be discerned through an emic perspective (how do the people under study understand things?)” and an “etic perspective (how can the researcher link data from the community under study to similar cases conducted elsewhere?)”<sup>56</sup> (p 75). In short, it is not enough just to recount and describe one’s personal experiences, although such technique is often used in purely evocative autoethnographies. To be truly ethnographic, both analysis and interpretation are required.

Autoethnography then, is a method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing. The term has a double meaning, referring to the reflexive consideration of a group to which one belongs as a native, member or participant, and also to the reflexive accounting of the narrator’s subjective experience and subjectivity (autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest). This distinction can be blurred. As Maréchal (2010) notes, autoethnography is sometimes synonymous with self-ethnography, reflexive ethnography, and performance ethnography, and can also be associated with narrative inquiry and autobiography (p 43). As Anderson succinctly concludes:

A central feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is a highly visible social actor within the written text. The researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered as vital data for understanding the social world being observed.

(Anderson, 2006: 384)

Allen-Collinson, (2013), makes a number of incisive observations about the autoethnographic method and role. Autoethnography can provide us with a potent methodological means of engaging in a discursive and representational space for voices hitherto unheard or actively silenced, thereby posing a direct challenge to hegemonic discourses (p 290). In developing this thought, Neumann, (1996), opines, “Autoethnographic texts ... democratize the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power” (p 189), and so as Langellier (1989) concludes, provide “representational space for those with divergent voices to actively contest,

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<sup>56</sup> Note that emic and etic perspectives are further discussed on pages 92-95 below.

and even de-legitimate, dominant meaning systems” (in Allen-Collinson, 2013: 290). As Pathak (2010) notes, autoethnography can provide a potent means of mounting epistemological challenges; it has the capacity to disrupt and contest conventional discourses and to engage in powerfully political ways (p 1ff.).

## **Evocative and Analytical Autoethnography**

Ellingson and Ellis speak in detail of “evocative autoethnography” and “analytic autoethnography” (2008: 445. See also Anderson, 2006). These concepts are key to this research, as it uses both. An evocative autoethnography would be valuable in itself. However, when combined with an analytical approach, the research is strengthened, thereby adding to its credibility, transferability and dependability. This thesis embodies both evocative and analytic autoethnography by aligning my own personal experiences with those of others, and with the literature.

### **Evocative Autoethnography**

Autoethnography finds much of its explanatory and persuasive power by being evocative. By telling the story, it evokes; it suggests, elicits, produces, or draws forth a vivid impression of reality, it brings about memories and stimulates the imagination (Evoke, 2012) to “create an emotional resonance with the reader” (Anderson, 2006: 377).

Being evocative stirs emotions and adds strength to the subject matter. According to Weaver-Hightower, (2012), evocative autoethnography “can make a powerful ineffable contribution to human understanding that supplements (and sometimes exceeds) what can be conveyed in realist ethnography” (p 143). Weaver-Hightower (2012) also describes evocative autoethnography as an artistic style of writing that can “access a different domain of comprehension” creating “vicarious access” to the lives of others, whereas “a purely analytic approach (if such a thing can exist) would prove insufficient” (p 463-464). Through detailed accounts of events, evocative autoethnography can be used to talk of trauma, of disruption and loss in people’s lives and thereby creating a compelling, moving and evocative picture.

### **Analytical Autoethnography**

An analytical autoethnographic approach helps reveal my own experience and that of others. It analyses what occurred, and how people responded, using my own experience as a basis from which I extend to those of others. Anderson (2006) identifies five features of analytic ethnography as follows. I used this as a guide for my own approach:

1. **Complete Member Researcher (CMR) status:** The autoethnographer should be “a ‘complete member’ of the social world under study”, or “the ultimate participant in a dual participant-observer role”.
2. **Analytic reflexivity:** The autoethnographer should be aware of their connection to the research environment and their effects upon it (Davies, 1999: 7). Further, there is a clear reciprocity between researcher and the researched where one informs the other, a “mutual informativity”; the reflexive process affects both and will bring about change in both that should be acknowledged. The researcher should be “visible, active and reflexively engaged in the text” (Anderson, 2006: 383).
3. **Narrative visibility of the researcher’s self:** The autoethnographer should not be invisible in the text but stand out as an active participant in the work in a self-revealing way as a conscious participant through an engaged dialogue. The researcher’s own feelings and experiences are to be incorporated into the text and considered as important data. “Autoethnographers should illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others” (Anderson, 2006: 384).
4. **Dialogue with informants beyond the self:** The autoethnographer must avoid self-absorbed digression and not “lose sight of the ethnographic imperative that we are seeking to understand and make sense of very complex social worlds of which we are only part (but a part nevertheless)” (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont 2003: 57 in Anderson, 2006, 386). Analytic ethnography seeks “interrelationships between researcher and others to inform and change social knowledge” (Anderson, 2006, 386). Analytic ethnography requires the involvement of others.
5. **Commitment to theoretical analysis:** The autoethnographer has to take us beyond their personal experience to somewhere we could not otherwise go. The purpose is the construction of meaning and values by the use of “empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data

themselves” (Anderson, 2006, 387). As Anderson concludes, “The definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization” (p 388). Karp (1996) agrees: “the value and vitality of a piece of research depend upon its providing theoretical illumination of the topic under investigation” (p 14). Without the theory, the experience may just be a story.

(Anderson, 2006: 378-388)

Anderson has above encapsulated what a good analytic autoethnographic model looks like, as does Geist-Martin’s (2008) insight that “real auto-ethnography must include theory ... I want them to take it somewhere ... allow me to see the connections theoretically” (in Smith-Sullivan, 2008: 92).

### **Verifying Autoethnography**

While autoethnographies do not make claims to objectivity or to be representative, they nevertheless claim to be true. On the question of how claims made by autoethnography are best verified, Brandes (1982) argues that the veracity of the material is “rooted as much in the anthropologist’s personality, and the purely fortuitous circumstances into which he or she is thrust” (p 190). This is certainly applicable to me and my experience of Black Saturday.

The evaluation and assessment of autoethnography can be difficult. Smith-Sullivan, (2008) observes that Ellis “does not advocate an ‘anything goes’ approach to writing autoethnography” (p 95), and cites Bochner (2000) observing that there should be no criteria (p 93). Any autoethnography should provide evidence of research quality and in-depth analysis, along with Geertz’s “thick description” (1973). An evocative autoethnography should leave the reader open to being moved and reflexive. An analytical autoethnography should include data analysis that prompts the reader to be moved and challenged. When planning, researching, constructing and writing an autoethnography, I believe there is a pathway or cycle that can be followed.

### **Autoethnographic Method**

Autoethnography is now a well-accepted qualitative method (Alston & Bowles, 2003: 203; Gwyther & Possamai-Inesedy, 2009: 106-107; Hakim, 1987: 26; Winchester, 2005: 6). I utilised this method by involving myself as part of the inquiry. In

recounting my own Black Saturday and post-disaster experiences I was able to use those experiences as guide posts to cross-check, to see if others had similar experiences, and to address the thesis research questions.

Within the autoethnographic method and pathways I discovered the existence of a cycle that can be followed. I developed a conceptual model for this project as shown in **Figure 3.1** below. It has inner and outer circles and begins at the top with the external self: with me. By following the pink arrows around in linear fashion, yet constantly referring to the inner-self via the yellow arrows in reflexive fashion, it ends with the inner-centred self, the 'me' who I rediscover through the process of the autoethnographic journey.

Indeed, it is the self, the reflexive *me* that provides the glue which binds the whole together. The pathway or cycle begins with the **Self** (Foster, 2007) at the point where I began my journey. From there it moves rapidly to the **Culture**, the 'ethnos' of the project (Trujillo, 2004), being the culture of the community, then to the **Context**, as described by Ellingson (2004) which in essence is the 'event(s)' that are the subject of the research. We consider the **Site**, the location, the 'where' of the project (Ellingson, 2004, Trujillo, 2004), then the **Others**, the community, reflecting upon the 'who' of the project (Foster, 2007; Trujillo, 2004). **Interviews** are then arranged with selected people, the individuals, and data collection commences (Trujillo, 2004). Here the story-telling develops, with the **Evocative**, which can be described as 'the feeling' or 'the story-telling' (Burnier, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Spry, 2008) and the **Analytical**, which can be described as 'the thinking' or 'the investigation' (Anderson, 2006; Burnier, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). **Issues** and themes then arise, being 'the what' of the project (Spry, 2008), followed by the **Blending** and **Sense- and meaning-making**, being the analysis, the 'why' (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Foster, 2007), which then moves to the **Theoretical**, the understanding, 'the how' of what has occurred (Foster, 2007; Geist-Martin, 2002; Tillman-Healey, 1996). If appropriate and applicable, we then move to the **Political**, being the conclusions and implications (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), then to the **Outcomes**, being the results and future considerations (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Finally, at the end of the process we end up coming back full-circle to the **Self**, (Russell, 2008) which is where I conclude what I have learnt along the way.

## A Conceptual Autoethnographic Model and Cycle

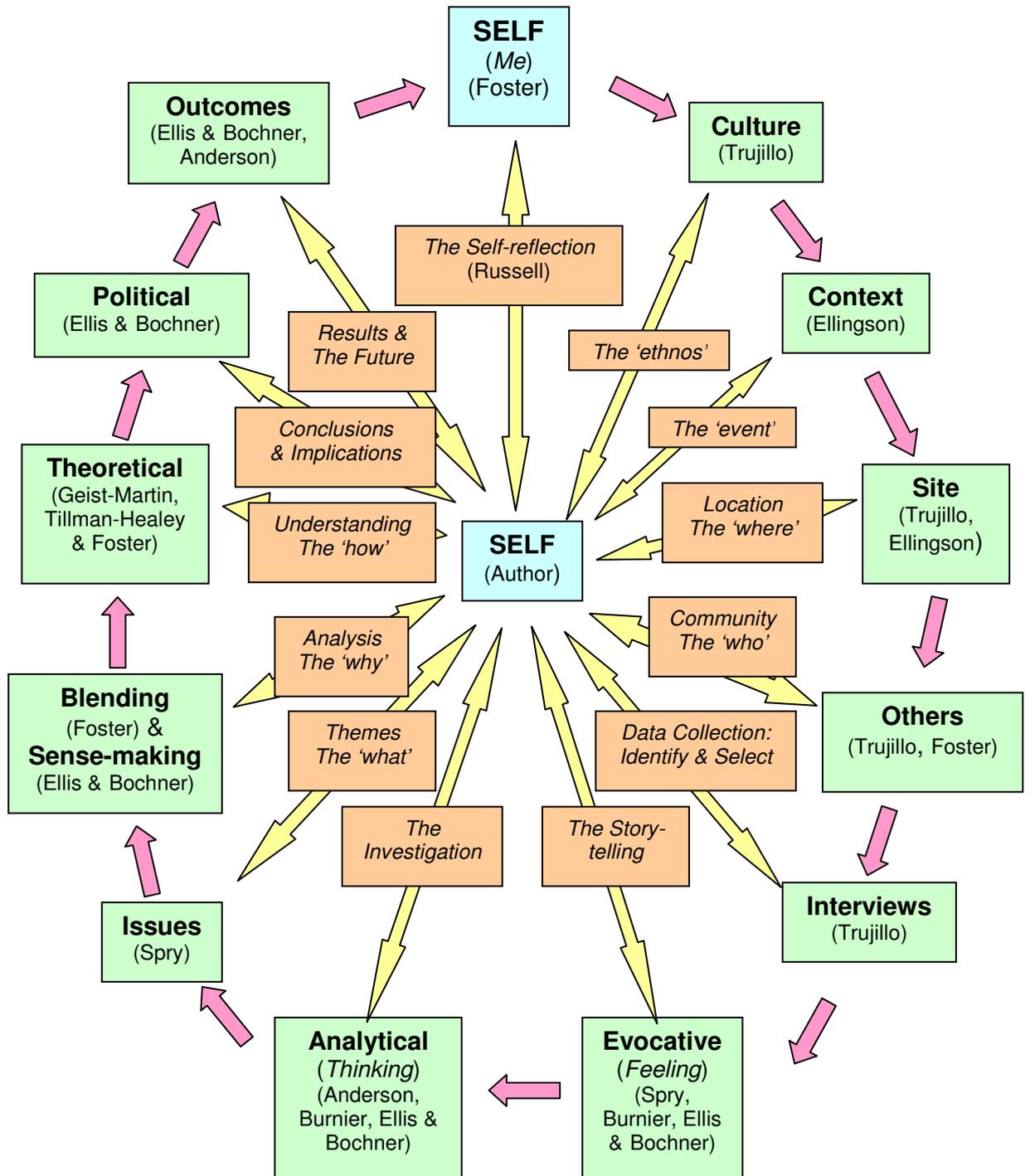


Figure 3.1: A Conceptual Autoethnographic Model and Cycle.

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### Critiques of Autoethnography

Autoethnography has been an acknowledged research technique for almost two decades and has been used extensively in research and writings about disability and trauma (Anderson, 2006; Hoppes, 2005; Smith-Sullivan, 2008; Weaver-Hightower, 2012). However, autoethnography is apparently still not fully accepted by some as a respected form of method. Its practitioners have faced accusations of narcissism and self-indulgence (Delamont, 2007; Sparkes, 2002). Perhaps these criticisms reflect how this genre of qualitative research remains misunderstood and ill-examined. Autoethnography has come in for its fair share of criticism as it attempts to find not only its place within the accepted, respected and conventional qualitative research field, but as it also works towards a clearer definition of itself. Such criticisms include use of arguably derogatory terms such as ‘narcissistic’, ‘confessional’, ‘self-indulgent’, ‘self-focused’, ‘self-absorbed’, ‘lacking in academic and methodological rigour’ (Anderson, 2006; Delamont, 2007; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Jenks, 2002; Smith-Sullivan, 2008; Sparkes, 2002; Wall, 2008). Such criticisms indicate that some space should be devoted to addressing them.

Postmodern research methods are an attempt to move away from the traditional education methods and research restrictions of the past, and as such should be encouraged. The time of the old-style objective and superior all-knowing (ethnological) researcher conducting patronising and condescending research of primitive peoples (in whatever culture) is long gone. There is a place for autoethnography in modern research as it provides a valid alternative to traditional research methods. It can deliver a powerful and effective outcome in evocative form, or via analytic form, or both. Autoethnography can provide for research where the researcher is, without reservation, intimately involved in the subject of the research – indeed, often the researcher *is* the subject of the research. Unfortunately, however, as Anderson (2006) notes, autoethnographers “remain largely marginalised in mainstream social science venues, due to their rejection of traditional social science values and styles of writing” (p 377). This is clearly unfair.

### **Delamont’s Critique**

In one of the most strident criticisms I have read, Delamont’s *Arguments against Auto-Ethnography* (2007) proposes six reasons why autoethnography has very limited credibility. Delamont’s pointed critique argues that “autoethnography is essentially

lazy” (2007: 1). This is an unfortunate opening criticism, as in my experience autoethnography done properly is anything but. Indeed, having conducted earlier qualitative research of many kinds, I would argue that autoethnography is in fact far more difficult than some conventional research methods, and certainly more personally challenging, rigorous, confronting and demanding.

Delamont describes the growth, development and advancement of autoethnography as “pernicious” (2007: 1). Perhaps this is just a matter of opinion, but it is difficult to see the growth of autoethnography as an accepted alternative research method being insidious, ruinous, hurtful, evil, wicked or fatal, as ‘pernicious’ is so defined. Delamont’s criticisms are as follows, and I briefly provide a counter to each of them:

1. Autoethnography “cannot fight familiarity” (Delamont, 2007: 1). Of course not; in fact, truth be told, ethnography has never been able to fight the familiar, despite its many generational attempts to try and hide the familiarity of researcher involvement. Autoethnography acknowledges and at last embraces and celebrates the fact that it is impossible to fight familiarity.
2. Autoethnography “is almost impossible to write and publish ethically” (Delamont, 2007: 1). This is not true, a view clearly endorsed by the ethics committees of many reputable world-wide tertiary institutions. Even in the case of this project, if the RMIT Ethics Committee was not satisfied that this work could be written and published ethically, I would not have received approval to conduct it.
3. Autoethnography “is all experience, and is noticeably lacking in analytic outcome” (Delamont, 2007: 1-2). Delamont’s exposure to autoethnographic works must be rather limited. There are many fine pieces of analytic autoethnographic works published (for example, Ellingson, 2001; Weaver-Hightower, 2012).
4. Autoethnography “focuses on the powerful and not the powerless” (Delamont, 2007: 2). Again, Delamont’s exposure to autoethnographic works must be limited. From what I have read I would suggest the opposite is true. There are many stories told by people who without autoethnography would remain powerless to tell their story and it would be left untold (see Taber, 2010: 13).
5. Autoethnography “abrogates our duty to go out and collect data” (Delamont, 2007: 5). This criticism, as applied to both evocative and analytical autoethnography, is, once again, simply not justified. Autoethnography is not to be confused with autobiography

or personal narrative where at times data collection may be minimal; however, they are quite distinct in their differences. Whilst some styles of evocative autoethnography may at times be flimsy in terms of conventional qualitative understandings of data collection, the data collection in relation to analytical autoethnography (as in this thesis) is often onerous and enormous.

6. Autoethnographers “are not interesting enough to write about” (Delamont, 2007: 5-6). Here Delamont appears to revert to an outdated view of an ethnographic world where the investigator should remain anonymous. As noted in point 1 above, in the postmodern world of research, this view has long been discredited (see Anderson, 2006: 376-77).

Delamont’s critique seems to pose straw-man arguments and then knock them down, failing to highlight the many qualities and advantages of the autoethnographic method. For my part (and that of my PhD Confirmation Panel and Ethics Committee) it was difficult to see how this project could be successfully and ethically carried out using any research method other than autoethnography.

### **Other Considerations: Insider-Outsider – Emic and Etic**

There has long been debate about the advantages and disadvantages of insider or outsider research and the emic or etic perspective (Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999; Xia, 2011). However, insider-outsider perspectives are not mutually exclusive.

An insider is a member of the community being studied whereas an outsider is not (Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Holloway, 1997; Morris, et al., 1999). These terms also relate to being an ‘emic’ or ‘etic’ researcher. Emic research relates to both insider psychological studies of folk beliefs, and cultural anthropologists’ understandings of culture from an insider’s perspective, or as Kottak (2006) puts it, “how local people think” (p 47). Etic research is the outsider’s perspective and takes a more behaviourist approach linking cultural practice to external factors that may not be apparent to the insiders studied (Morris, et al., 1999: 781), or again as Kottak puts it, ‘shifts the focus from the locals to those of the anthropologist’ (2006: 47).

This research utilises emic (insider, localized) and etic (outsider, generalizing) positions (Holloway, 1997: 53). It takes an emic perspective in telling my own story

and making my own meanings, in addition to the etic perceptions of the interviewees' experiences and the meanings they give. My experience as the insider (emic-localized) and outsider (etic-generalizing) is shown in **Figures 3.2 to 3.5** below.

Morris, et al., (1999) conclude that a synergy between both insider-emic and outsider-etic approaches is useful because “incorporating insights from both traditions avoids limitations of purely etic and purely emic findings” (p 794). As Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009) conclude, “there are costs and benefits to be weighed regarding the insider versus the outsider status of the researcher” (p 59) and that:

Being an insider might raise issues of undue influence of the researcher's perspective, but being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective.

(Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009: 59)



**Figure 3.2:** On our Marysville property in March, 2009. I am perhaps already unwittingly commencing insider (emic-localised) research.<sup>57</sup>

Being both insider and outsider in this research places me in an uncommon position for insights and understanding. Perhaps this is best underscored by one of the people I interviewed, Jenny, who suffered a great deal of loss both during and after the fires:

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<sup>57</sup> **Source:** Author's collection – from *The Age*. Vic.: Fairfax Media.



**Figure 3.3:** Researchers in 2009 doing their outsider (etic-generalizing) research at Strathewen in the traditional way. LaTrobe University's lead fire-ground researcher, Professor Jim McLennan, is at centre.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 3.4:** The author doing outsider (etic-generalising) bushfire research at Connelly's Marsh, Tasmania, January 2013, after the extensive fires around Dunalley. My insider (emic-localised) Black Saturday experiences greatly assisted me in gaining research insights about the Tasmanian disaster.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Source: <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/>

<sup>59</sup> Source: Author's collection. Image: Melissa-Jane Belle, University of Tasmania.



**Figure 3.5:** The author doing further outsider (etic-generalising) bushfire research at Mt. Victoria, NSW, December 2013, after the extensive fires in the Blue Mountains. My insider (emic-localised) Black Saturday and outsider (etic-generalising) Dunalley experiences further assisted me in gaining insights about the NSW disaster.<sup>60</sup>

Jenny told me that the insider advice she gives to counsellors is simply this: “What you need to understand is that you can’t understand unless you have been through the fire.” I think outsider researchers need to understand this truth.

## Data Analysis

The various types of interviews, documents, observations and other sources were all initially given equal weighting, although the more intense experiences of some interviewees were prioritised for deeper analysis, many of which are quoted later in the thesis. All information was integrated and merged with my own autoethnographic experiences providing a synthesis in accordance with ethnographic data analysis procedures. In accordance with Prill-Brett (2011) the data were organised to generate patterns, categories and then themes, which were tested for any emergent hypothesis while looking for and considering alternative explanations (p 27). Further, Prill-Brett (2011) suggests the “conceptual ordering” (p 30) process of ‘establishing general categories, themes and patterns’ is the “most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun” (p 30). Prill-Brett (2011) also notes that in establishing the “‘truth value’ of the study” (p 33) a number of matters must be addressed, and they are as follows:

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<sup>60</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: Natalie Sanders, NSW Rural Fire Service.

**Credibility:** Are the findings credible and by what criteria can they be judged? It should be established that the research “was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described” (Prill-Brett, 2011: 33). In this thesis the answer is yes.

**Transferability:** Are the findings able to be transferred to a different setting or population? (Prill-Brett, 2011: 33). In this thesis the answer is both no and yes. The actual circumstantial findings cannot be transferred, but the theoretical underpinnings and knowledge can be.

**Dependability:** Prill-Brett (2011) asks, “Can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?” (p 33). In this case the answer is no. This study is simply a snapshot in time. Revisiting the same people and asking the same questions would now elicit different responses, and that is only natural with the passage of time.

**Conformability:** Prill-Brett (2011) asks, “How can we be sure the findings are reflective of the subjects under investigation, and the inquiry itself, rather than a creation of the researcher’s biases or prejudices?” (p 33). The thesis has been subject to rigorous and extensive theoretical, academic and participant cross-checking. Its conformability has been confirmed at numerous levels and has not been subject to dispute.

**Triangulation:** uses a range of information to cross-check, as Prill-Brett (2011) notes, “to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research in question” (p 32). Prill-Brett argues that this strategy will “strengthen the study’s usefulness for other settings” (p 32). Such triangulation has been used extensively to confirm the thesis outcomes.

When considering the spectrum of ethnographic data analysis strategies, Prill-Brett (2011) suggests being the “Devil’s advocate” to “critically question the researcher’s analysis” (p 34), to conduct a “constant search for negative instances” (p 34), to be “checking and rechecking the data and purposeful examination of possible rival hypotheses” (p 34). Prill-Brett (2011) also suggests devising “tests to check analyses and apply the tests to the data, asking questions of the data” (p 34). In one form or another, these useful strategies were all applied to this research.

## **Using and Interpreting Evidence: Sense and Meaning Making**

Krauss, (2005), states that rigour in qualitative data analysis is necessary to maximise the potential to generate meaning and that effective and meaningful research “can only be accomplished within a framework and approach that encourages immersion of the researcher into the research setting of the respondents” (p 765f.). No doubt this is true. What better way to achieve that end than the researcher being a part of the respondent community and the research being an autoethnography? That said, total immersion and participation produce other challenges, as I observed earlier in this chapter. Recollecting and reflecting on the experience of others (ethnography) and my own experience (autoethnography) is central to this thesis. Krauss posits that qualitative method is primarily about “meaning making” (p 762) in a human social context, and that,

... the goal of qualitative investigation is to understand the complex world of human experience and behaviour from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest.

(Krauss, 2005: 764)

Not only does the qualitative method assist in constructing meaning, Krauss (2005) refers to Lofland and Lofland’s (1996) view that meanings are transbehavioural, not only describing behaviour, but defining it, justifying it, and also interpreting it. Krauss adds that the need for meaning-making is a “distinctively human” attribute and that humans have “a natural inclination to understand and make meaning out of their lives and experiences” (2005: 762).

### **Inductive Data Analysis**

Inductive data analysis methods are described by Thomas, (2006) as the use of “raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (p 238). More specifically, Strauss and Corbin, (1998), note “the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p 12). This is in stark contrast to deductive analysis whereby Thomas (2006) notes that analysis is aligned with “prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses identified or constructed by an investigator” (p 238). As Thomas clarifies:

The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies.

(Thomas, 2006: 238)

Once satisfied that sufficient information has been collected (data saturation), Alston and Bowles (2003) suggest that inductive data analysis comprises three stages: 1) data reduction, 2) data organisation, 3) data interpretation (p 207). They suggest that “data analysis usually occurs simultaneously with the data collection phase, a continuous cyclical process” (p 204). Such an iterative process has been a focus of this project. Data reduction, organisation and interpretation lead to “convergence” (Yin, 2009: 117) so that the data – the evidence – will emerge and lead us to certain facts, that may then be categorised into themes. A “chain of evidence” (Yin, 2009: 117) is established thereby adding weight to the argument and increasing the reliability of the work (Yin, 2009). The data collected was also contextualised and confirmed with my own observations to aid with interpretation and thematic construction.

To help narrow the scope of the investigation, ‘filters’ (parameters or limits) are applied by regularly re-visiting the research questions. Commonalities in people’s stories are determined and allocated into categories of content, which can then be used to create themes (Dunn, 2005: 100). According to Dunn, (2005), there are two types of content analysis, the “manifest” (visible surface content) and the “latent” (determining underlying meanings; findings that lie hidden) (p 100). Some things appear obvious; others are not, requiring further inquiry, analysis and interpretation. The information collected for this thesis was sorted into themes and informs the hypothesis whereby sense and meaning-making can occur.

Allied to Geertz’s ‘thick description’, meaning-making is also related to Weber’s anthropological term *Verstehen*, literally, ‘to understand’. As Elwell (2005) says, understanding is to “perceive, know, and comprehend the nature and significance of a phenomenon” ... “to grasp or comprehend the meaning intended or expressed by another” and “to refer to the social scientist’s attempt to understand both the intention and the context of human action” (p 1). This is how we make sense and derive meaning.

## **Ethics Approval**

The research project received RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval on 20/9/11 and the Approval Number is 47/11. The HREC assessed the project as being 'More Than Low Risk' and required a number of considerations and precautions to be implemented via an 'Ethics Risk Mitigation Strategy'. This was completed and implemented. A copy of the 'RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee Notice of Approval', 'Ethics Proposal Amendments and Risk Mitigation Strategy', 'Plain Language Statement' and 'Prescribed Consent Form' are attached as **Appendices C, D, E and F**.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I described the three methods used in the thesis – qualitative phenomenology, ethnography and autoethnography. I determined that a phenomenological approach was the most appropriate, with ethnographic and autoethnographic methods deemed the best way to connect with the small number of people whose experiences as survivors of Marysville's Black Saturday bushfires are the central focus of this thesis.

The ethnographic and autoethnographic method has been described, noting that the thesis relies on the value of interview-based "thick description" (Geertz, 1973: 6). The chapter has considered what constitutes successful and effective autoethnography, has considered criticisms of autoethnography, has considered the project's theoretical framework and research design in the context of qualitative research and data analysis, and has considered elements of data analysis and sense and meaning-making.

With the theoretical components of literature and method now addressed, exploration of the research proper, with its background, descriptions, analysis, interpretations, themes and findings, can begin.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Four: ‘*Marysville – Ordeal by fire ...*’

“There’s just something about Marysville ...”

(Tony, Erica, & André)



**Figure 4.1:** The Marysville district prior to Black Saturday, looking north from Keppel Lookout. Buxton Peak is at centre with the Cathedral Range at upper right. The deciduous trees of Marysville township are plainly visible at lower centre-left. English Broom is in yellow flower in the foreground.<sup>61</sup>

I love Marysville too. I first went there in 1976 and stayed overnight in the now destroyed Scenic Motel. Like so many others before me, I loved Marysville’s innate charm, quaint structures and natural mountainous beauty. The old buildings, the well-established English gardens and enormous oak trees lining the main street seemed to transport me to a different and nostalgic era. Even though pre-Black Saturday, Marysville had few, if any, of the remaining old Victorian buildings to remind of its origins, it was nevertheless just so pretty; a quaint, picturesque old town.

When the opportunity arose to move to the country, to do a ‘tree-change’, it seemed inevitable that Marysville would be the first choice. In August 2006, my then-wife Jennifer and I left Melbourne to start a new life in Marysville, having bought the worst house in the best street to renovate the property and open an antiques and collectables shop. After 15 months of renovations, we opened the shop in November 2007. However, by mid-2008 it was clear the shop was not going to make us a living. In March 2008, I secured full-time work at Coldstream, and in November 2008,

<sup>61</sup> Source: <http://intothewhiteblog.blogspot.com.au/2014/11/racv-marysville-marathon-festival-50km.html> and [australiantraveller.com](http://australiantraveller.com)

Jennifer began working with me at Coldstream as well, so we began packing up the shop and both ended up travelling ‘down the line’<sup>62</sup> every day, over the ‘Black Spur’.<sup>63</sup> That was a disappointing but necessary decision. My intention was to continue trading locally and on eBay to sell off the rest of the shop stock, but that was not to be. Less than three months later, it was all gone.

The thesis research questions ask how survivors of Marysville’s Black Saturday bushfires experienced post-fire attachment, grief and loss, and of how those experiences affected their recovery. Before addressing those questions it is necessary to provide some background to set the scene so that we can see how things changed in Marysville after the fire. Hence, this chapter considers the geographic, historic and community context of Marysville from its origins as a gold-mining supply town of the 1860s to 1890s, then as a timber-milling and picturesque tourist town throughout the twentieth century, to now, into the twenty-first century and post-Black Saturday, as a mainly tourist town.

Here I briefly portray the pre-Black Saturday community of Marysville utilising my personal knowledge and some secondary sources. The prelude to Black Saturday is described, as is the fire event itself. My autobiographic story of that fateful day is also told to locate myself within the context of the broader firestorm experience. Biographic accounts of some Black Saturday interviewees that have rarely been heard before are also included to give voice to their experiences and provide pointers towards what was to come for them during the recovery period. The chapter describes what Marysville was like pre-fire and how it was profoundly changed by the event. The chapter concludes with some closing observations about Black Saturday by way of introduction to Chapter Five.

## **Marysville and Surrounds**

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Down the line’ is the local expression for driving south-west over the Black Spur down past Healesville to Coldstream, Lilydale and Melbourne.

<sup>63</sup> The ‘Black Spur’ (originally the ‘Black’s Spur’) is the section of the Maroondah Highway that traverses the Great Dividing Range over the Dom-Dom Saddle between Healesville and Narbethong. It is so named after the ‘Blacks’, the local Woiwurrung (Healesville area) and Taungurong (Narbethong area) aboriginal people (both groups being a part of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation) who apparently used the same route to travel from the Acheron River valley across to the Yarra River valley and *vice versa*. The ‘Black Spur’ is not an officially recognised name for that section of the Maroondah Highway, but is the name always used by locals.

Marysville is a small town nestled within mostly mountainous bushland located in Victoria's Great Dividing Range about 1½ hours' drive from the Melbourne CBD.<sup>64</sup> Cottrell (2005) discusses the North American and Canadian terminology of a "wildland-urban interface" (p 110), noting five definitions. Cottrell's fifth definition describes the community of Marysville, saying such places are:

Small-to-medium communities (often aboriginal settlements or resource-based communities with populations ranging from 500 to 50,000) surrounded by vast expanses of forest.

(Cottrell, 2005: 110)

Marysville's location, as shown in **Figure 4.2** below, has it marooned in the midst of just that, a vast expanse of forest. This was of course a part of its appeal, attracting both tourists to visit, and retirees to relocate. As Kenealy (2006) recounts, the first tourists came to Marysville in the early 1900s with the advent of the motor vehicle. Numerous guest houses were established, with visitors enjoying walks amongst the tall trees, the Steavenson River and Falls, and enjoying the bird life and peaceful serenity of the environs. Amid the quaint village atmosphere of the town, sawmills had operated at its northern and southern boundaries. Many timber workers had lived in small fibro<sup>65</sup> homes throughout the town, many of which before Black Saturday had been purchased by weekenders.<sup>66</sup>

The small urban community of Marysville is set within a network of smaller and larger communities. It had a pre-Black Saturday population of about 520 residents (and decreasing) and was almost entirely surrounded by thick bush, making it in this context what Cottrell (2005) also refers to as a "peri-urban zone"<sup>67</sup> (p 110), which is the level of interface between urban development and the bush. For much of Marysville's outskirts, urban development and the bush met on the back doorstep, making the town's vulnerability to fire extremely high.

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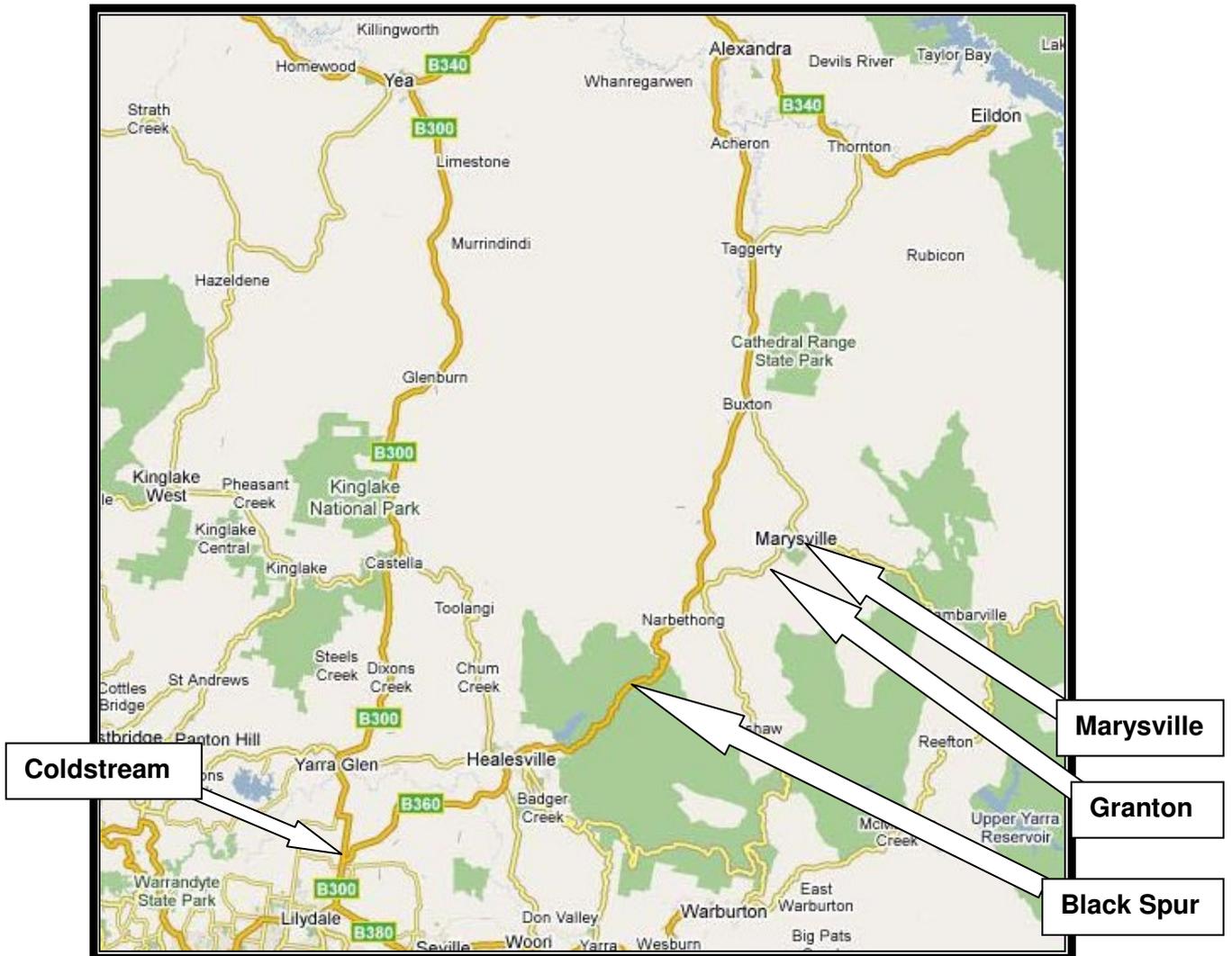
<sup>64</sup> CBD: Central Business District.

<sup>65</sup> The colloquialism 'fibro' is an abbreviation for fibrous or fibre cement sheet, more correctly called Asbestos Cement sheet or 'AC sheet'. It is a building material in which asbestos fibres were used to reinforce thin rigid cement sheets. It is now known to be highly toxic.

**Source:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asbestos\\_cement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asbestos_cement)

<sup>66</sup> Weekendens being non-permanent residents whose principal place of residence lay outside of Marysville, usually in Melbourne.

<sup>67</sup> The word 'peri' means 'about', 'around' or 'near' and gives rise to the word peripheral (Brown, 2007: 2162-3).



**Figure 4.2:** Marysville and surrounding districts, showing the Maroondah Highway from Lilydale (bottom left) through to Alexandra (top centre right) and the forests of the Black Spur between Healesville and Narbethong. Whilst National Parks and closed water catchments are shown in green, most of the land surrounding Marysville is also thick State Forest.<sup>68</sup>

The Marysville township is a part of a localised community referred to as ‘the Triangle’ consisting of Marysville and the two nearby towns of Narbethong and Buxton as shown in more detail in **Figure 4.3** below. Within the Triangle community most of Narbethong and virtually all of Marysville were destroyed on Black Saturday; however, much of Buxton escaped relatively unscathed.

Midway between Marysville and Narbethong lies the small hamlet of Granton, also severely affected by the fire, and about 21 kilometres east of Marysville lies the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort, which sees the tourist population in Marysville swell considerably during the winter months. It too was severely damaged by the 2009 fires.

<sup>68</sup> Source: [http://www.delderfield.com.au/images/regional\\_map.jpg](http://www.delderfield.com.au/images/regional_map.jpg)



**Figure 4.3:** A closer view of the Marysville and Triangle region, showing the complex of river systems, and the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort at mid-lower right. Despite the dark green shading of State and National Parks, much of the land area shown on this map is in fact dense bush.<sup>69</sup>

### Marysville Background and Community

It's difficult to describe Marysville before Black Saturday as so much has changed in what seems such a short time. Marysville was a quaint and picturesque country village that seemed very English in appearance. The buildings in Marysville were generally understated and the main street, Murchison Street, was lined with English Oaks and London Plane Trees, as shown in **Figure 4.4** below. The original sixteen oak trees were reputedly planted by Thomas Barton in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, one for each of his 16 children (Kenealy, 2006: 19).

<sup>69</sup> Source: <http://www.albury.net.au/~tim/marymap1.JPG>



**Figure 4.4:** The east end of Marysville’s main street, Murchison St, showing Reddrops Foodworks at left, the Corner Cupboard Café at centre left, and at centre right, the ‘F J Barton Bridge’ over the Steavenson River and the Anglican Church on the hill. At the roundabout just over the bridge, the road forks left to Buxton and Alexandra, and right to Lake Mountain and Woods Point.<sup>70</sup>

In the early days, the prodigious Barton<sup>71</sup> family owned much of Murchison Street and were fervent gardeners of the English style. As Kenealy (2006) notes “Barton gardens along Murchison Street have always been admired. The properties no longer bear the Barton name but they surely bear the stamp of having been Barton gardens” (p 19). Alas, no more. All but two of the Barton Gardens were entirely obliterated on Black Saturday; mine was one of the two remaining, the other at the Lolly Shop. These gardens, much imitated throughout the town, were what so many people loved about Marysville. After a while, Marysville had established a reputation as a holiday destination, and also supported a number of timber mills scattered throughout the district. The timber industry was prodigiously active in generating jobs and incomes for locals.

The combination of the tourist and timber industries kept Marysville going well for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century things were changing. The local timber industry was winding down and is now all but gone save for the few log trucks still travelling through Marysville. Milling ceased in Marysville in the late 1990s, and

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<sup>70</sup> Source: <http://www.travelvictoria.com.au/marysville/photos/>

<sup>71</sup> No known direct relation to the author.

the three remaining mills at Narbethong were destroyed on Black Saturday and not rebuilt. Tourism was also a struggle as Marysville competed with the rest of regional Victoria to attract day-trippers and weekenders to come and enjoy the district. All of that changed too on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009.

For many, Marysville was just a nice place to visit; a beautiful locality, full of history, with a friendly, pleasant and relaxed ambience. As a result, many retirees moved to the town and, combined with its handy proximity to Melbourne, it maintained a country village atmosphere. Nevertheless, Marysville was not without its own domestic issues, facing both a declining population and a declining economy. The population was aging, with many leaving the town, and the timber industry in the district had (and has now) all but disappeared.

As is the case with many similar towns, the Marysville community had multiple overlays and social networks. The town population was made up of long-term, third and fourth generation residents born and bred there, mixed with recent arrivals made up of retirees and younger folk, often with young families, seeking a rural lifestyle, cheaper accommodation and whatever employment was available, or small business opportunities that could be created. Some of the older social networks were difficult for newcomers to penetrate and join as there were older family-based generations in control. As Arthur said: “There were a lot of old families here, in Marysville, and they very much thought they controlled it.” Nevertheless, there were plenty of opportunities for newcomers to become a part of the community. Marysville had many social groups and a great deal of social interaction occurred, not only on a daily basis ‘in the street’ but also through organisations such as the Marysville Kindergarten and Primary School, the Marysville Golf and Bowls Club, the Lions Club, the five churches, the Historical Society, the Gallipoli Park Committee, the local Country Fire Authority (CFA)<sup>72</sup> unit, the local State Emergency Service (SES)<sup>73</sup> unit, the local Ambulance unit, other sporting groups and leisure activities, other church groups, arts groups, walking groups, gardening groups and the like.

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<sup>72</sup> The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is a mostly rural (although Melbourne-based) statewide Victorian volunteer firefighting organisation that deals mainly with fires and road accidents.

<sup>73</sup> The State Emergency Service (SES) is a state-wide (although Melbourne-based) Victorian volunteer emergency services organisation that deals mainly with fallen trees, storms, floods, other natural emergencies, and in some regions, also with motor vehicle accidents.

Pre-fire Marysville was a strong and cohesive community with a high degree of social capital as displayed by the level of formal and informal interactions between its older multi-generational and newer residents, and the community hospitality extended towards tourists. Many visitors to the town fell in love with it, bought properties, and moved in. They got to know their neighbours, joined various organisations and became a part of the vibrant community and its environs. They established a secure base, developed attachment to place, and felt topophilia in action. Many of them died on Black Saturday.

## **Black Saturday – Fire in Marysville**

### **Prelude and Preparation**

Many people, including myself, never thought that Marysville, a whole town, could be burnt to the ground. Indeed, when asked, Colin said “I would’ve honestly thought that the likelihood of the whole town burning was ridiculous,” and his wife Lyn added, “As far as we knew there had never been a bushfire in Marysville”. Audrey was much the same: “I was very complacent. I thought Marysville would never burn and particularly the main street. I thought I was quite safe. There were a few years where I had my car packed in the summer, had everything of value packed in my car ready to go, but then it never happened. So I was really complacent again.” Claire too was complacent living in town: “Anywhere at all that you care to live in the country is a fire risk as far as I’m concerned. I went through Ash Wednesday. Fire risk didn’t bother me.” The risk didn’t bother Claire, but at the same time, she did little to really prepare, escaping at the last minute with next to nothing. Shane had clearly thought about the risks: “Oh, I guess we always thought it’d be high because we’re right on the edge of the mountains. That was about as far as I thought about it. Our plan was always to get out.” In the end, however, Shane and his wife Barbara were trapped by the fire at their home and couldn’t get out. They narrowly escaped with their lives. Simon was quite up front about it: “Well, I’d have to say never – personally, never thought of it.” He and his wife Gwen also narrowly escaped and saved nothing. Arthur too was quite succinct: “Never even thought about it.” And Brent too was complacent: “It never really occurred to me... At least Marysville, it was – even though we’ve got bush around us, it’s still very open, a lot of deciduous trees.” The idea that the town could be burnt to the ground was beyond the comprehension of

most residents. For this reason there were no in-town fire preparations. I was guilty of the same complacency and lack of preparation. For some, underestimating the size and possible intensity of a bushfire, not having a fire plan, not being prepared and not having adequate shelter all proved to be fatal mistakes.

### **Pre-fire Conditions: Weather and Ignition**

After many years of drought, extreme and unusual weather patterns occurred in the lead-up to Black Saturday, Australia's worst bushfire event on record in terms of lives lost. In the week preceding the fires, an exceptional heatwave affected south-eastern Australia. From the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, Melbourne broke records by sweltering through three consecutive days above 43°C with the temperature peaking at 45.1°C on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, the third hottest day in Melbourne's history (VBRC, 2010e: 1). The state of Victoria was baked crisp. Forecast conditions for the 7<sup>th</sup> of February were extreme, the driest since the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983. The Government issued numerous warnings in newspapers, television and on radio, with then Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, making a televised appeal on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February for people to "stay at home" and "be prepared" (Moncrief, 2009).

By 11.00am on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February the Melbourne temperature was already 40°C, peaking at 46.4°C at 3.04pm. Strong winds blew and fires were breaking out everywhere, with approximately 316 fires reported burning across the State that day (VBRC, 2010e: 1). Of these fires, numerous spot-fires were started by firebrands<sup>74</sup> carried by the gale force winds, travelling well ahead of main fire-fronts to ignite further blazes, which then united to form even larger fire-fronts.

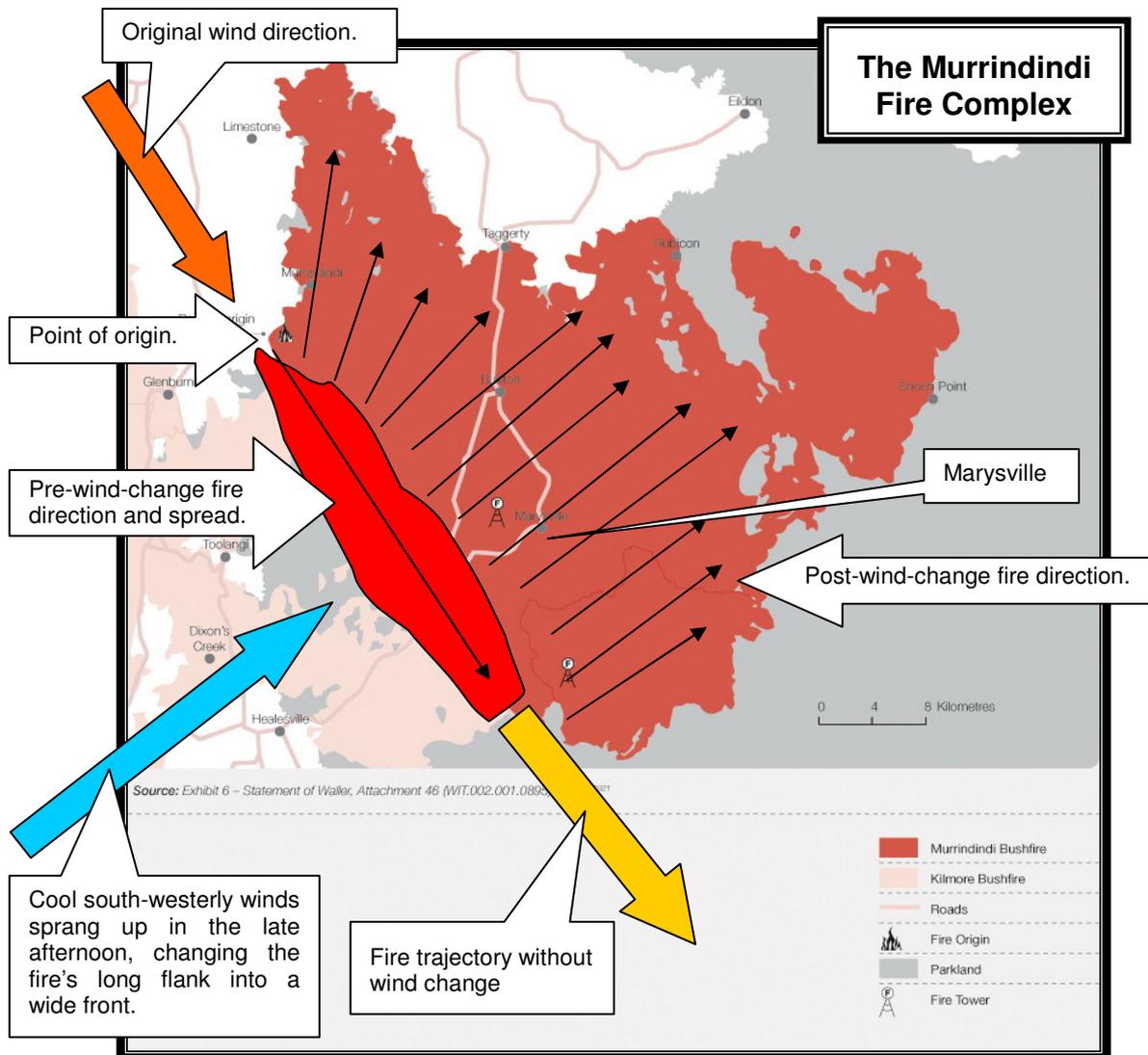
As a result of a snapped and arcing power-line during gale-force wind gusts (Lillebuen, 2015), the Marysville fire ignited just before 3.00pm near the Murrindindi Mill, some thirty kilometres north-west of Marysville. Driven by high winds, within minutes the narrow head of the fire was roaring its way south, south-east through the thick forests towards Narbethong. The Murrindindi Fire Complex is graphically

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<sup>74</sup> A 'firebrand' is a piece of burning wood or other material, in this context often small in nature (bark, twigs and small branches) lifted and carried by super-heated air thermals and deposited some distance ahead of a fire-front, thereby igniting another fire.

Sources: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/firebrand?s=t> and <https://blog.csiro.au/four-years-on-investigating-the-behaviour-of-the-kilmore-east-fire/> and [http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/finaldocuments/summary/PF/VBRC\\_Summary\\_PF.pdf](http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/finaldocuments/summary/PF/VBRC_Summary_PF.pdf)

shown in **Figure 4.5** below. The nightmare had begun. Many thought the fire would narrowly miss Marysville as it headed towards the Warburton Valley.



**Figure 4.5:** This diagram is overlaid on to the VBRC Murrindindi Fire Complex Map showing the effects of the wind change that then struck Marysville and Buxton, the trajectory of the fire had the wind-change not occurred, and the final full extent of the fire area shown in red.<sup>75</sup>

But then, at about 5.30pm, the wind changed. As shown in the diagram above, the long northern flank now became one huge fire-front and the entire conflagration raced north-east, straight in to Marysville. Meanwhile, many residents in Marysville were sitting inside their homes sheltering from the blistering heat, recorded by vehicle thermometer at a staggering 56°C at 5.30pm. They were totally unaware of the fast-moving monster that was over the other side of the ranges, now rapidly heading in their direction, which would without warning devour their town.

<sup>75</sup> **Original Map Source:** <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Commission-Reports/Interim-Report/Chapters/The-February-2009-Fires>

## My Story<sup>76</sup>

In the days leading up to Saturday the 7th of February, 2009, there were many warnings about what the weather was going to be like. The conditions were predicted to be worse than those of the 1939 and 1983 bushfires. As I had been overseas in the UK for the last two weeks of January (where it was freezing) I didn't pay much attention upon my return; I made no preparations at all. Because we lived in the middle of Marysville, amongst many English trees, I thought we were safe. The thought of a possible need for evacuation never even occurred to me.

That Saturday began the same way as any other, except that by early morning it was already very hot. I remember saying to Jennifer when she expressed some concern about fires, "Don't worry, entire towns don't burn down". I suppose that's a case of famous last words. Late Saturday morning I went down to the Lolly Shop to get some Turkish bread, as was our custom. I spoke briefly with Di James about how hot it was. She was concerned about the chocolates getting too warm and going soft. I took my Turkish bread home; Jennifer and I had our usual Saturday lunch.

Early in the afternoon, our local electrician and friend David Littlejohn called in for a visit. We discussed our proposed house renovations over an unhurried cup of tea, and David left at about 2.30pm.<sup>77</sup> I went to the adjacent Service Station and Hardware Store to purchase some line-marking paint from Kevin, our ballroom dancing instructor, who also worked in the shop, and we chatted for a while.<sup>78</sup>

By mid-afternoon there was not a cloud in the sky and I thought things were going well; however, the first smoke appeared quite a distance away at around 3.30pm (see **Figure 4.6** below). I checked both CFA and DSE<sup>79</sup> websites, which reported a 'small fire at Murrindindi Mill' with no trucks attending. I wasn't too concerned as the smoke was a long way off. The CFA website notification was not updated for the duration of the afternoon, remaining the same until the power went off at 5.21pm.

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<sup>76</sup> What follows is an abbreviated excerpt of my experiences on Black Saturday. A full description of what occurred for me that day can be found at **Appendix G** in my Autobiographical Account.

<sup>77</sup> Later that evening as the town was burning, David narrowly escaped from Marysville with his life.

<sup>78</sup> Kevin died in the inferno at his home about 6 hours later.

<sup>79</sup> DSE: the then Department of Sustainability and Environment, now the Department of Environment Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).



**Figure 4.6:** A photograph of the first smoke seen coming in over Marysville, just as I saw it at about 3.30pm, 7/2/09.

**Source:** Image: Wayne Renfrew

<http://www.theage.com.au/photogallery/2009/02/07/1233423551136.html>

By about 4.00pm, with the gathering smoke thickening and rumours of a large fire over the Black Range (west of Marysville) I thought I'd better put together some fire protection – just in case, even though I thought, 'This is a bit late and a bit of a pathetic effort'. I joined two hoses together to create one long one to connect to the high-pressure tap in the front yard and ran it out to the back yard. I wanted enough hose to get right around the house with the high-pressure water if need be. I filled a wheelie bin, wheelbarrows and buckets with water and soaked some hessian bags. I hosed down the back of the house and the outside blinds; the water immediately evaporated. It was stinking hot; it was all rather pointless.

The spiralling smoke clouds started to look ominous, blocking out the sky and looking a lot closer. Things seemed a bit serious and that we may need to evacuate. I started looking around, thinking of what to take, looking at our library of over 4,000 books and thinking, 'There's just so much – where do I start, what do I take?' I concluded that I'd be better off making fire preparations to fight the fire (which I thought would be just ember attack) rather than trying to empty the house of precious things. There was just so much to rescue and so little time to do it.

During the course of the afternoon, the CFA siren at the Emergency Services Complex sounded twice. As both soundings were for short periods, I correctly assumed they were a call-out for additional CFA volunteers to attend. I was still not worried as I assumed that any fire would be confined to the bush around Marysville and that the fire itself would not actually enter the town. It was now about 4.15pm. There were no warnings from any official source that a fire was on its way to Marysville. By 5.00pm the town had become very quiet; there was light smoke haze everywhere, and few people on the streets. Had I been forewarned about what was coming our way, valuable time could have been spent packing our most precious belongings, and more time used to help evacuate more people from the town.

Jennifer and I were both members of the Marysville State Emergency Service (SES) Unit. At about 5.00pm an SES call-out came on our mobile phones for members to come and assist with a 'precautionary evacuation' of the Retirement Village. Jennifer went to assist. It looked as if things were getting a bit serious. I put on my bright orange SES coveralls and stayed, making more fire preparations.

The power went off at 5.21pm. Shortly after, I received an SES call-out to attend a 'Road Crash Rescue' (RCR). A large tree had fallen across a travelling car, essentially landing in the driver's lap. Bev McGeary lay trapped in her car by the crushed roof. I assisted with extracting Bev from the wreck; she was bundled into a waiting ambulance and rushed to Alexandra. She was lucky to be alive. The RCR effort took about 30 or 40 precious minutes. It was about 6.10pm; the wind was blowing at gale-force gusts of up to 130 km/h and the temperature was logged at 56°C by a friend's in-car thermometer.

Our SES crew then went to the home of an elderly infirm woman, Susan Lucas, to evacuate her. Dan and Marie Walsh were standing around outside Susan's property asking what was going on. We advised them to leave town immediately. They didn't.<sup>80</sup> Jennifer departed at about 6.25pm to take Mrs Lucas to Alexandra Hospital, where they safely arrived about half an hour later.

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<sup>80</sup> Having survived the fire-front by sheltering in the Cumberland Resort, Dan returned to their home to put out spot fires. The Resort later caught fire and his wife, Marie, along with David and Kate Whittington, who were all still sheltering in the Resort, perished.

Back at the Emergency Services Complex, someone called in and told me there were about 200 people down on the Gallipoli Park Oval who needed to be evacuated. Shortly afterwards a police car with two policemen in it drove into the Emergency Services Complex. I told them about the people at Gallipoli Park and they headed down there. It was becoming clear that the entry of a major fire into the town area was imminent. The three other SES volunteers and I agreed that it was time to get out of town. It was about 6.35pm.

I quickly went back home to refuel my almost empty car with two jerrycans of diesel. I looked west up the main street (Murchison St) towards Melbourne and what I saw quite surprised me. Towards the top of the town there was a 350-400ft high wall of churning, swirling almost bubbling grey-black smoke and cloud. It was whiter towards the top, and at the base was a wide bright red-orange glow, which was probably about 150-160ft high in itself – it was clearly visible. The sky had gone very dark. There was a curious eerie stillness in the midst of all the noise – if that makes any sense at all. Small flaming branches, large pieces of burning bark and embers were falling out of the sky. Ash was falling everywhere; I was startled by how suddenly everything had so very quickly turned so very ugly.

The noise was increasing, it was getting harder to breathe; the oxygen was being sucked out of the air and my eyes were starting to sting. I quite pointedly noticed these effects and thought, ‘This can’t be good’. Entering our house – it was pitch-black dark inside and I could hardly see a thing – I grabbed a torch, turned it on, and saw Jack, our Maltese Lhasa-Apso cross dog. He looked quite frantic and was jumping around excitedly. I thought I’d better get him out of the house as things seemed to be getting quite serious. I saw his yellow food bowl, and thought he’d need that. I thought he’d need some water too, so got a bottle of water out of the freezer where Jennifer had put a few bottles earlier in the day. I thought I’d better get some drink for me too, so opened the fridge and grabbed a two-litre bottle of Fanta, putting them all in a bag. Finding my way with the torch, I carried Jack and the bag to the car. The smoke had become very thick. It was about 6.45pm.

I decided it was time to leave, went back and locked the front door, and fully expected to be back after the fire-front had passed. I didn’t expect that I’d eventually be chased by the fire all the way to Alexandra. I didn’t get anything else from the house –

nothing at all – thinking that the house, being in the centre of the town, would be fairly safe.

Unbeknown to me at the time, the eastern edge of Marysville was already ablaze from falling firebrands well ahead of the main fire-front. Returning to my car I heard a tremendous noise behind me, which sounded like about half a dozen jumbo-jets taking off – it was an incredibly loud, heavy, concentrated and dense noise. I looked up the main street and could see that 3-400ft. high towering plume of greyish-black swirling churning smoke. Still at the base of the smoke was the huge 150ft high bright orange-red band, only now it was coming in to the town. Again I thought to myself, ‘That can’t be good’. Curiously, it started to rain.<sup>81</sup>

I could see the main fire-front was already entering the western town precinct. People on that side of the town were already dead, or imminently about to die; it must have been about 6.50pm. The fire arrived in central Marysville at about 6.55-7.00pm. The whole town was fully alight by 7.15pm. Getting in the car, I headed out of town towards Buxton. I had only driven about 500 metres when I realised I didn’t have my wallet or my wedding ring. I thought for a minute about going back for them, but looking back across to the centre of town there was nothing but black smoke; I thought better of it. I thought I’d be back in a few hours anyway, and all being well, I’d get them then. I still didn’t think that our house would burn down.

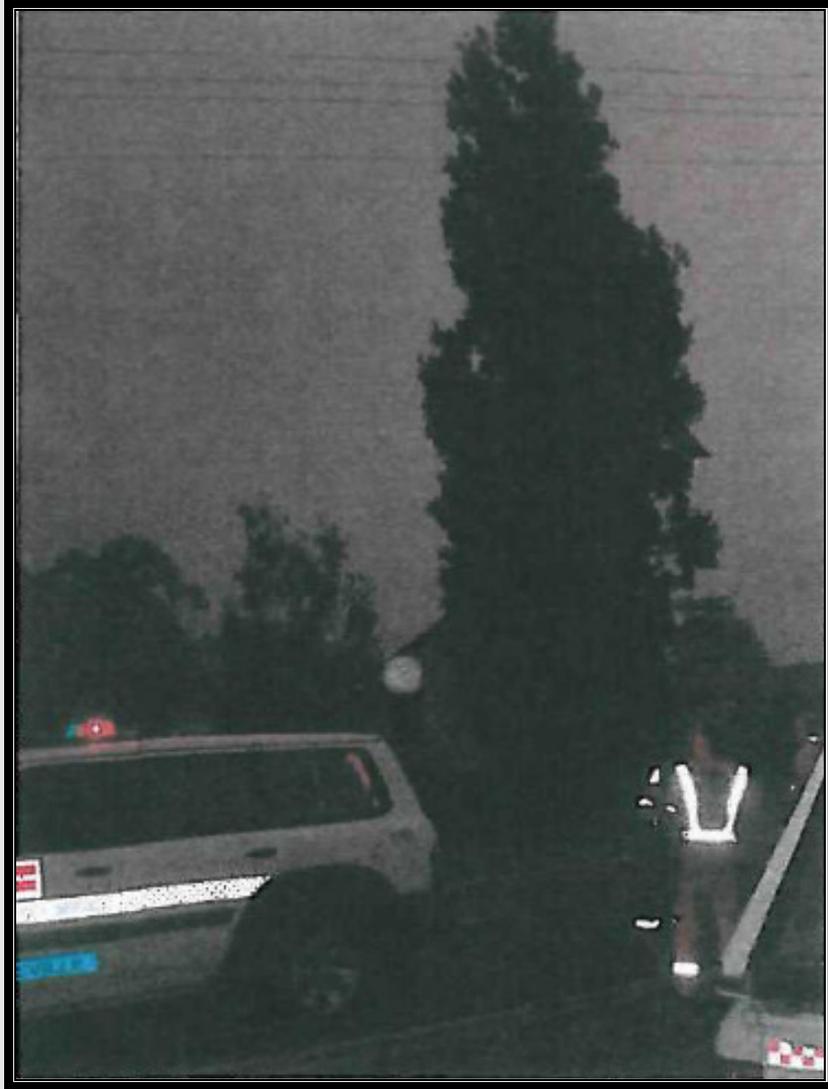
I travelled to the Golf Course Car Park where there were quite a few people gathered. Keith from the SES and I cleared the car park, telling everyone to go to Alexandra. I was there for about 8 to 10 minutes. I then travelled to Buxton, pulling up next to Keith’s SES Nissan Patrol. He gave me one of the SES portable radios, which proved most useful for the rest of the evening until the battery went dead later that night. One of the policemen from Eildon asked me to perform traffic duty at the Buxton-Marysville intersection (as shown in **Figure 4.7** below) making sure the traffic kept moving and answering as best I could any questions that people had.

By about 7.35pm the traffic seemed to have ceased; there were no more vehicles coming through. After a while it was agreed that the police and SES would leave and

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<sup>81</sup> The ‘bushfire rain effect’ is caused by “a larger updraught of hot air, carrying moisture from burning vegetation. As this updraught mixes with colder air at altitude, the water vapour condenses into fluffy white Pyrocumululus cloud. As it grows, the cloud may develop into anvil-shaped Pyrocumulonimbus and produce a shower of rain.” (Hambling, 2014).

head for Alexandra as well. I checked on Jack and he was not happy, lying on the back seat prostrate and panting in the thick smoke; I wondered if he would survive. It was about 7.40pm.



**Figure 4.7:** A photograph of me standing between Marysville SES Unit Vehicles *Rescue Two* and *Rescue Three* at the intersection of the Marysville-Buxton Road and Maroondah Highway at 7.33pm (when it was usually still bright daylight) just prior to departing for Alexandra.

**Source:** VBRC: WIT.3009.001.0015 Image: Josephine Hunter.  
<http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Documents/Document-files/Exhibits/WIT-3009-001-0015.pdf>

The drive to Alexandra was slow, at about 60 to 70 km/h. The smoke was very thick but visibility was still okay to drive. It was difficult to breathe. I arrived in Alexandra at about 8.10pm. It was now pitch-black dark. Alexandra was blacked-out with no power and the smoke was very thick; it was quite difficult to breathe and my eyes

were stinging badly. I wanted to get out of it all, but there was simply nowhere to go. Poor Jack was struggling to breathe. I gave him more water, comforted him, talked to him, saying, "Hang in there little buddy". He was clearly distressed and I was very concerned he was going to die. I looked for Jennifer at the Alexandra SES shed but she was not there. I was told she was at the hospital, so I went there. It was very hard to see the road. There were no streetlights and the smoke was choking thick.

I arrived at the hospital at about 8.30pm. The hospital had emergency generator power, so that was comforting. I found myself in Accident and Emergency where I was surprised to see Bev McGeary lying on a trolley. She was okay. I went looking for Susan Lucas, finding her sitting up in bed, bright as a button. I'm pleased to know that if we had not retrieved her from her house she would have without doubt perished in the fire.

I found Jennifer; we hugged and talked about what was happening. I rang my mother at about 8.45pm to let her know we were safe. A young orderly made us a cup of tea and a sandwich. One of the nurses told us we could stay the night with her mother if we needed to. We thanked her; she said she'd let her mother know we were coming, and gave us directions to her home unit. Many injured people with burns, smoke inhalation and eye problems were coming into the hospital. We were just in the way, so decided to return to the Alexandra SES shed to see if we could do anything. We left the hospital at about 9.15pm.

We stayed at the Emergency Services facility for about two hours, listening to the reports; it didn't sound good. People were talking about the need to evacuate Alexandra as the fire was heading towards Taggerty, showing no signs of slowing. (CFA crews and farmers halted the fire later that night in the paddocks and farmland around Taggerty.) We were told we'd be called if we were needed, and to go and find somewhere to stay the night and get some rest. It finally dawned on me that we would not be going back to Marysville and actually needed to stay the night at Alexandra.

We decided to see if we could find the home of the nurse's mother, so headed off back towards the hospital, finding her unit on the main Alexandra-Eildon Rd. It was by then about 11.30pm. Mrs Thompson opened her front door and was waiting for us in her dressing gown. We were filthy and exhausted, realising that we had nothing but the clothes in which we stood. Mrs Thompson made us something to eat and we

watched the TV late news – it was horrifying. There was nothing about Marysville. We both had a shower and finally got to bed at about 12.45am, but didn't sleep much at all. Jack seemed okay and slept on the floor beside us. It was still exceptionally hot.

Everything happened so fast – it was such a rapid change. In the space of four hours the afternoon had gone from being just hot, windy and uncomfortable to our having lost everything. Families, friends, pets, homes, possessions and our beloved town had all disappeared in an immense firestorm. What a shock – surely this could not be happening? Surely the town can't be just gone? Surely this could not be true?

Shock and denial are well acknowledged as being the first of the five stages of a loss and grief reaction (Kübler-Ross, 1969). A numbness set in as we all began to grasp the enormity of what had just happened, of all that we had lost, and of how it was going to affect all of our lives. At this early stage, I had no idea of the effect my experiences would have upon my own attachment behaviour, of my ability to process loss and grief, and how that would affect my recovery. The same is true for others, as we were all about to find out.

## **Other Survival Stories**

Many others in Marysville had incredible stories of survival to tell. They all shared one thing in common; they had no real warning that the fire-front was on its way, so could not mentally or physically prepare themselves. The fire rapidly descended upon them as an apocalypse. Each person or couple had an experience unique to them, yet shared in-kind with many others. Perhaps in many ways everyone's unique survival story prescribed the way they would respond to the recovery process that was soon to follow. Their stories, much abbreviated as follows, tell of narrow escapes, their fight for survival, attempts to save pets and possessions, but mostly of how they just saved themselves.

### **Colin and Lyn's Story**

Colin reported, "We were completely a hundred per cent ready according to the fire plan for that particular day, because all around Victoria it was clear that it was an accident waiting to happen. The question really was where was it going to happen?"

Colin and Lyn had packed their two cars and camper trailer. As Lyn said, “I had all the photos, CDs, they were all in there.” Colin added, “Everything was put in there, in the car for safekeeping, because our plan was to go and if nothing else, to go across to the oval at least.”

However, at about 6.45pm the fire-front arrived so fast and was so fierce that they could not even get to their cars. They reported, “This great red thing hit us. The sky went black; there was a most incredible screaming engine noise – like a massive jet engine roaring. Someone has since described it as a ‘fire tsunami’.” The heat was intense; Lyn could “...feel all the moisture being sucked out of my facial skin.” Colin continued, “The garage – which seemed so close before, may as well have been a hundred miles away now ... If we’d tried to run to the cars to escape, we wouldn’t have made it. We would’ve suffocated to death in the effort.” Colin and Lyn raced back into the house. Meanwhile, the two cars and camper trailer were engulfed in flame, and so was their house. They sheltered inside for some time, throwing buckets of water on parts of the house that were catching fire inside. Fire was coming in through the melted skylights; they moved from room to room as each one ignited. They were powerless to do anything as the fire raged outside as well. As Colin said (with some understatement), “Now we knew we were in trouble.” As the house continued to burn it was becoming increasingly unbearable. The smoke was getting thicker; they could hardly see and could hardly breathe.

Colin recalls, “It was now time. Time for decisions, serious decisions. Time to decide what to do. We knew we wouldn’t survive in the house for much longer, killed by the thick acrid black smoke or killed by the roof collapsing in on us.” Lyn continues, “We were down to our last breaths and minutes if we hadn’t left straight away ... Colin picked up the cat basket and slung the camera over his shoulder and I grabbed my handbag and another bag. We took a deep breath and opened the front door.” To their amazement the fire-front was receding from their house (an element they attribute to ‘God’s grace’). As they left, the house “exploded into flames”. Despite the intense heat, they waited in the front yard for a while, Colin taking photographs. Soon a CFA truck came by, and even though there was no room for them in the truck, it drove slowly down to Gallipoli Park providing shelter for them in its lee as they walked beside it. Colin and Lyn arrived at Gallipoli Park at about 9.20pm where they remained for the rest of the night.

Even though they thought they were well prepared, Colin and Lyn left it too late to leave and were caught by the rapid and intense fire. Their story tells of the initial importance of their pets and some possessions, although later it was just a matter of personal survival. Their attachments to all they had known rapidly vanished that night. Even though they stayed in the Temporary Village (see Chapter Six) and thought they would rebuild, they eventually left Marysville and moved to another town in country Victoria. More of their story is told in Chapter Five.

### **Deb and Mark's Story**

The power had gone out at about 5.20pm. Deb and Mark were sitting inside their home, trying to keep cool. All the blinds were down and the curtains drawn as they sat reading. Later in the evening, close to 7.00pm, Deb got up to boil the kettle on the gas stove to make a cup of tea and think about dinner. By chance she pulled back the curtain on the kitchen window and to her horror, she saw the house next door on fire. She yelled out to Mark, and they looked out the back door to see their house surrounded by flames. "Where's the cat?" she screamed. They both raced around, found the cat, and Mark, being a chef, grabbed his good set of knives. They both, cat and knife roll in hand, ran for their car. They jumped in and drove out the drive but could not see a thing. Fortunately for them a CFA truck happened to be driving by and they pulled in behind it, "sitting up its bum," as Deb remarked. It was pitch black dark. They followed the fire truck to safety, and as Deb said, "If it hadn't been for that fire truck driving by we'd have been dead." Deb and Mark's narrow escape also tells of the lack of warning and the importance of pets and some possessions. Their attachment to Marysville was forever destroyed; they never returned, and moved to Queensland.

### **Claire's Story**

Claire relayed her story to me in quite some detail. She told me that she had a fire-plan, albeit a simple one:

I blocked up all windows and doors, filled everything that I could with water. I had wool blankets specifically set aside for dampening down to use in case I needed to cover myself. I always kept heavy clothing, so I had boots, heavy trousers, heavy shirt, leather gloves, mask, the whole lot. Hoses were always

connected and I had switched them on at the tap and just left the trigger to hold the hose. At about 4.30pm a guy came around and he said “the fire’s are all fighting at the edge of Marysville; the fire’s come down the back, up near Kings Road.” I said, “Okay, thank you.” So we thought ‘okay, there’s a bit of threat here.’

Claire said to her partner, Alex (who according to Claire initially seemed rather uninterested in the whole business) that they needed to load up the car:

We need to pack clothes; we need to take whatever we want. I grabbed a few things, and I had on the kitchen table my box of important papers, and I thought, ‘right, that’s got to go with me.’ All of a sudden Alex kind of went from being nonchalant to suddenly being a panic merchant, then I couldn’t calm him down. We had time to hitch up my caravan; we had time to fill the caravan; we had time to fill the car; we had time to do a lot of things, but I was just tearing my hair out trying to get him to take me seriously. Then he went into panic mode when he saw the smoke coming from the other side; he wouldn’t take anything, wouldn’t take a thing. He was out at the car ready to go. I think he would have driven off without me. I said, “Look, we’re not going anywhere just yet.” I said, “Just calm down and let’s look at the situation.”

Claire described what happened next:

Then this guy came around again and he stopped; we still don’t know who it was, and he said, “If you’re staying, and you do need at the last minute to get somewhere,” he said, “they’re evacuating through either Gallipoli Park or the Cumberland.” I said, “Okay, thank you very much, I’ll just wait and see what’s going to happen first.” I don’t know how long it was until later when the sky went black and that awful roar, and the fireball coming down Mount Gordon,<sup>82</sup> and I just looked at it and thought, ‘This isn’t any ordinary bushfire. I don’t think I can handle this one.’ So I decided, ‘we have to go, we can’t fight this’ ... So yeah, it was all on fire by the time we got in the car.

Claire and Alex were still able to see enough to drive down to Gallipoli Park, but were redirected back out of Marysville by the police on to the Buxton road as a part of the convoy that was then leaving Marysville. Claire and her partner Alex did not live

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<sup>82</sup> Mount Gordon is the mountain range that runs roughly north-south to the immediate west of Marysville. See the map at **Figure 4.3** on page 104.

together; his home was in Melbourne. Claire was an avid collector and had many prized possessions to which she was deeply attached, but owing to their confusion and the rapid arrival of the fire, she was unable to save anything. Her home was burnt to the ground and she lost everything – but at least she was alive. Claire too stayed in the Temporary Village for a time and eventually rebuilt her home. By way of sad sequel however, after battles with cancer, Alex died in 2014 and Claire died in early 2016, her new home still not quite completed.

### **André and Rachael's Story**

André and Rachael's home was made of mud brick – they had built it themselves. It was solid and André had plenty of full water tanks. He was a country bloke, so understood about fires and was well prepared with pumps and hoses. On the afternoon of Black Saturday, he and Rachael were going about their business, nevertheless aware that there was a fire some distance away in the Black Range, but 'too far away to be worried about,' thought André. However, late in the afternoon, having gone outside for something, André looked down towards the river and saw all the trees on fire. "Christ," he said and sprang into action. The fire hoses had already been rolled out, as they were all summer, just in case. He called to Rachael who promptly grabbed her bag and said "I'm out of here; I'm off to Alexandra." André tells me that was better for him because, despite being alone, he didn't have to worry for Rachael's safety. With Rachael gone he set about hosing down the house and sheds. Within minutes all the vegetation about him was ablaze. André doused whatever fires he could, but they were everywhere, all about him. André recalls:

I couldn't breathe. The heat was intense, unbearable. I was constantly soaking myself with water because it dried off so quickly. At one point a massive fireball rolled up the driveway, physically knocked me back against the side of the house and burst against the garage, instantly setting it on fire. 'This is it,' I thought. 'I'm going to die here'.

After a few minutes André managed to struggle to his feet and continue the fight. About four hours later he had saved the house, although damaged, but lost his garage, workshop, sheds and two cars. He stayed up all night putting out spot fires. André reckons the fight knocked years off his life and when I asked him if he'd do it all again, he replied, "No way. Next time I'm out of here. I wouldn't ever want to go

through that again.” André had built their house himself and fought hard to save it and all else that was precious to him. In contrast, Rachael thought better of it and did not want to stay. As we shall see in Chapter Five, André and Rachael had to be rather inventive to be re-united after the fires. André and Rachael rebuilt the garage and remain living on the property to this day.<sup>83</sup>

### **Shane and Barbara’s Story**

Shane and Barbara are very lucky to be alive. They were trapped, had nowhere to go, and sheltered in their car as best they could (see **Figure 4.8** below). Their story is so dramatic it is best told in their own words, as Shane recalls:

I first saw flame from the fire at about 7.00pm on the ridge about one kilometre away. Two minutes later everything outside was on fire. Already I couldn’t see much, it was hard to breathe – red hot embers were already falling on us inside the house. I was putting fires out on the carpet in the living room. In the kitchen there was a tremendous ‘whooshing’ noise from the gas stove. The top of the range was blown off by gas venting with great force into the kitchen. I pulled the drawers out from below the cooking range and turned the gas cock off. The venting of gas into the room stopped but immediately the central heating return duct in the passage blew in. I saw the whole underneath of the house was on fire – the ducting was all aflame. I think I was yelling out to Barb about what was happening. She had moved from where she was near the window towards the front door and a moment later there was a tremendous explosion and the windows of the kitchen and dining room were all blown in. Flames and black, thick, heavy unbreathable smoke was everywhere. I yelled to Barb, “GET OUT! NOW! GET OUT!”

Barbara and I ran to the front veranda – my mind was racing at a million miles an hour – I didn’t expect our car to still be intact but it was. It was parked under the carport and was okay. We jumped off the veranda steps and I yelled to Barbara to get into the car. The car was open with keys in the ignition. For some reason I had left the keys in the car that afternoon despite normally locking the car, with the keys left hanging on a hook in the kitchen. That saved our lives; there was nowhere else to go.

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<sup>83</sup> Note that André too has had cancer treatment in recent years, although seems to be doing well at the moment.

It was too hot; too much flame – very thick, black, heavy smoke. I couldn't breathe. I'd fallen down on the deck after inhaling smoke and crawled back along the veranda – which was now flames everywhere. I got to the car – just got in – and started it up. Barb was already in the car and pleased to see me. I put the aircon on 'recirc' – full blast – and said to Barb, "This might be it, Darl – this is where we might die – nowhere else to go."



**Figure 4.8:** The view from Shane and Barbara's carport, taken as they sat in their car watching their home, two dogs and cat burn and wondering if they too were about to die.<sup>84</sup>

We didn't say much – just held hands and felt each other through our clasped hands – front windscreen so hot I couldn't touch it. Barb said, "What if the windscreen blows in?" I said, "If that happens, we're gone!" So Barb crawled over to the back seat, as if that'd make any difference. Ten minutes later she said, "How come I'm in the back seat?" I said, "I don't fucking know!" She crawled back over into the front seat.

Shane and Barbara stayed in their car for hours, engine running, air-conditioner on full. Towards morning as the fire died down they were able to escape their temporary air-conditioned prison that had in fact saved their lives, and make their way on foot to the Gallipoli Park Oval. Two of Shane and Barbara's neighbours were killed in the

<sup>84</sup> **Source:** Black Saturday Museum, Marysville, courtesy Barry Thomas.

fire; as Shane said, “We had to watch their home burn knowing they were inside.” Another neighbour died nearby in her car. They also lost two precious pedigree dogs and a pedigree cat that were an integral part of their family. Shane concludes:

We’re both very affected by this experience. Barb and I are alive but emotionally devastated from our experience and at the loss of friends, neighbours and our animals.

Shane and Barbara literally survived a holocaust. Whilst their Marysville holiday property was not their main home (they lived in Melbourne), their experiences and attachments to neighbours, and their prize pedigree animals which were like children to them, took an enormous toll on their lives. Their post-fire experiences are further explored in Chapter Five.<sup>85</sup>

### **Brent’s Story**

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Brent, who worked at one of Marysville’s many guest houses, had not ever considered the possibility of a bushfire in the centre of Marysville. However, when it became clear that the town was under threat, Brent said:

I came home about an hour before we evacuated and I grabbed woollen blankets and jumpers and I got changed into my jeans and Blundstone boots and stuff and just prepared. I grabbed my laptop and my SLR<sup>86</sup> camera for some reason and put them in an esky and that was about all I had. But it got fairly late and it was getting darker and darker – like, the smoke – and I said, ‘okay, I think it’s time to go.’ I decided to go down to the Gallipoli Park Oval because I really didn’t think we were under threat because we’d had no warning ... you know, the warnings weren’t there, the sirens, because everybody was out fighting the fire.

The head guys at the CFA, there were messages that were sent out to go on radio that got lost. They never got on radio to warn the towns what was coming. And so people got caught, they just got caught. And, anyhow, we went down to the oval and by the time we got there, they were nearly all gone. Everybody had been evacuated and the police said, “What are you doing here?” They said, “Head for

<sup>85</sup> Note that both Shane and Barbara have battled with cancer over the last few years, although they both seem to be doing well at the moment.

<sup>86</sup> SLR: Single Lens Reflex – a type of camera that allows the user to view a picture through a single camera lens via a ‘reflexive’ mirror and prism.

Alex, head for Alex. We're all going to Alex" [*Alexandra*]. I said, "I don't think I've got enough petrol to get to Alex." And he looked at – put his head in the window – and I had probably under a quarter of a tank, and he said, "You'll be right. You'll just get there." And so we went.

As I drove out of Marysville it just went black. I couldn't breathe. The smoke was that thick, I couldn't breathe. My eyes were tearing up and I had the headlights on full beam. Now if the car in front of me had've driven over a cliff, I would have followed it because I had no idea. There were cars hitting the footpath. You just couldn't see the road. It just went that black all of a sudden and, really, I don't know how the people on the oval survived.

When I got to Alexandra the smoke was just – it was making you feel sick, it was so smoky there. And you could see the Black Range on fire and everything. And people were talking, "Oh, everything's gone, Crossways<sup>87</sup> is gone, the whole town, you know, Marysville's gone." And I thought, 'bullshit', you know, 'you're not there, it's only hearsay.'

As it turned out, even though the Crossways had survived, yes, almost the entire town was gone. Brent didn't worry too much about possessions, as his account in Chapter Seven regarding saving a friend's budgies explains. However, his story does feature the lack of warning, the rapid onset of the fire, the panic of evacuation, and the disbelief of what was happening. More of Brent's post-fire story is told in Chapters Five and Six. By way of another sad sequel, Brent succumbed to cancer and died in early 2017.

The above accounts are only a few of the thirty or more stories I have collected since Black Saturday. Everyone who was in Marysville that day has their own graphic story of the way the fire took them by complete surprise, both in its rapid arrival and in its frightening intensity; there were so many close calls and miraculous survivals. Unfortunately, that was not the case for the 34 people in and around Marysville who died that day. The stories tell of a defining moment in people's lives, a moment when they did not know if they would live or die, when they realised that all they held dear to them was vanishing before their eyes. Forever our lives would now be defined as

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<sup>87</sup> Crossways Historic Country Inn is a restaurant and accommodation complex built in the 1920s. Though badly damaged, the buildings survived, with many spot-fires doused by owner Greg Cherry. The Inn has been repaired and refurbished, and is now most likely Marysville's oldest building. [http://www.goldberryaccommodation.com.au/index.php?p=1\\_4\\_crossways-historic-inn](http://www.goldberryaccommodation.com.au/index.php?p=1_4_crossways-historic-inn)

‘before the fires’ and ‘after the fires’. Pre-fire attachments dissolved in a sea of flame, replaced by a post-fire sea of loss and grief.

## Fire Summary

To say that the Black Saturday fire of the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, was a major catastrophe for Marysville is an understatement. Mere words cannot describe the real impact, physically, mentally and emotionally. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, Marysville had just been wiped off the map – erased – it just didn’t exist any more. As the then Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, said of Marysville in the days following, “There’s no activity, there’s no people, there’s no buildings, there’s no birds, there’s no animals, everything’s just gone. So the fatality rate will be very high.” (*Weekly Times*, 2009.) Whilst what the Premier had said was not literally true, it certainly felt for us as if it was. The remains of our property and the central Marysville town area are shown at **Figure 4.9** below.



**Figure 4.9:** Marysville town centre the day after Black Saturday, showing the corner of Pack Rd. (left) and Murchison St. (centre). The surviving Marysville Bakery is at centre-left with the green roof and the surviving Tower Motel with the grey roof is at top-centre-left on the left of Murchison St. Only four other buildings visible in this photo survived.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> **Source:** VBRC (2010a) Final Report, Vol. 1. (p 340). Image: Herald and Weekly Times. Vic.: News Corporation Australia.

We were not to know it at the time, but the intensity and power of the fire was simply frightening and unable to be withstood. It was reported that the fires “produced energy the equivalent of 1500 atomic bombs the size of the Hiroshima explosion - enough to power Victoria for a year ... at an intensity of 150,000 kilowatts per metre” (Kissane, 2009a). As a direct result of the fires and of an estimated Marysville pre-fire population of about 520 people, 35 lay dead, being 27 permanent residents<sup>89</sup> (approx. 5.2% of the permanent population), 2 part-time residents, and 6 tourists visiting the area that day (all out in the bush), (VBRC, 2010a: pp 306-328). Of an estimated 550 buildings, about 91% of the town was destroyed. There were approximately 50 structures left standing, (approx. 9% of the town’s buildings) being 33 homes, 9 commercial buildings and about 8 sheds (Rishworth, 2009: 1).

Much has already been written about what occurred in Marysville on Black Saturday. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) provides a detailed account in its Final Report, (VBRC: 2010a, pp. 144-168).<sup>90</sup> My own account highlights so much of what went wrong that day. There was no warning, no siren, nothing, and people had no idea what was going on until the very last minute (VBRC, 2010a 158-159). As we saw above, many people were shut inside their homes trying to keep cool; the onset of the fire happened so fast that most people were caught unaware. The police evacuation of Gallipoli Park was an impromptu affair that some have criticised, but fortunately, it all turned out well with no fatalities or injuries (Hess & Farrell, 2016: 324-326; Hughes, 2009; VBRC, 2010a: 153-155). The same cannot be said for many who tried to shelter in vain, or run from the flames on their own at the last minute. Many died lonely and horrific deaths.

The evacuation was never really official and almost nobody knew it was under way, except those participating in it. People just had to use their own initiative – it was up to them to get to a safe place. Some people in Marysville thought they were prepared and could fight the fire – many of them died in the attempt. There was no understanding of the size of the fire, of the utter inability of being able to combat it, or of the risks associated with attempting to fight it, or of fleeing at the last minute, not

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<sup>89</sup> Including one who died five days later as a result of the fire.

<sup>90</sup> Curiously, unlike the case with many other areas affected by Black Saturday, there have been no books published specifically about what happened in Marysville, or the experiences of Marysville residents on that day.

that they had any choice. As many have previously said, luck played a very large part in the survival of so many.

As the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found, (VBRC: 2010a, pp. 144-168), the CFA, Police and SES were all caught by surprise and totally overwhelmed. By the time the level and extent of the threat became apparent, there was simply no time to warn everyone (Hughes, 2009). People did the best they could at the time, but it did not have to be that way. Warnings had earlier been passed on to the Alexandra Control Centre at 3.30pm by the Marysville Fire Tower fire watcher, Andy Willans, (Kissane, 2009b; VBRC, 2010a: 150; Willans, 2012). Despite the fact that Mr Willans apparently also told Marysville CFA personnel to sound the town siren, this was never done (Willans, 2012). We can only guess at the difference it might have made to the loss of life had the town CFA siren sounded continuously from 3.30pm onwards on that terrible day. It may be fair to surmise that the lack of warning and the inability to fully evacuate the town ate away at the sense of community cohesiveness amongst many survivors. Anger, ill-feeling and blame were apparent in some, yet in others there were contrasting emotions of elation and relief that they had survived at all. As the recovery commenced, such complex and at times polar-opposite emotional responses would soon be exacerbated and begin to play out in many ways.

## **Chapter Summary**

This Chapter has introduced the town of Marysville, describing its physical surrounds, its past and recent history. We have considered the community of Marysville prior to Black Saturday and established that physically it was a picturesque town surrounded by native bushland and full of beautiful exotic vegetation, quaint buildings, and many good memories for those who lived there and those who visited regularly. We know that many people were deeply attached to this charming town and environment, and although they would not have labelled it 'topophilia', that is what it was.

We have briefly examined the prevailing weather conditions along with the circumstances of the Murrindindi fire's ignition and spread. I have told my story, presenting my own experience of that day, and included the experiences of many others in how they too lost their secure base in the inferno. The chapter has set the scene for what was to follow, and concluded with some broad observations about the

day of the fire and the response of emergency services. Whilst everyone's experience of a disaster is deeply personal and unique, there are nevertheless common threads of broken attachments and loss and grief that run through them all.

This background chapter concludes my examination of the Black Saturday fire event itself. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider other issues related to or arising from the fire. In the following chapter we now move to an examination of what happened during the first eight weeks post-fire – the initial response phase – and of my experiences and those of many others, and the effect that had upon us.

Sadly, Marysville is a very different place today. Much, if not all of the innate charm, quaintness and physical beauty of the town is now gone. With the exception of Crossways and Dickenson's Farm (the old Marysville House guest house) all of the old buildings and gardens have vanished. The enormous oaks are damaged shadows of their former selves (although some are now recovering) and this has dramatically altered the feel of the town. Marysville will doubtless one day improve, but it will take a very long time and it will be a very different town to what it once was.

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## Chapter Five:

### *The First Eight Weeks – The Response Phase*

*To deny people their human rights*

*is to challenge their very humanity.*

(Nelson Mandela)<sup>91</sup>

Soon after 10.00am on Sunday morning we went to the Alexandra Emergency Services Complex to see if we could be of any assistance. Shortly after we arrived, our SES Controller, Ian Bates, and Deputy Controller, Jo Hunter, walked in, having just come back from Marysville. They were both as white as a sheet, as if they'd just seen a ghost. They told us there was nothing left of Marysville and that our house was destroyed. We were advised that we had been stood-down from SES duties and should go down to Melbourne to find somewhere to live. Soon after, in a sense of disbelief and numbness, we departed Alexandra to travel to Melbourne, but closed roads, detours, thick smoke and heavy traffic meant the normally 1¼-hour trip took over three hours. Late that afternoon we arrived in Ringwood to stay with family.

In the previous chapter we examined the pre-Black Saturday town of Marysville, and heard the stories of those who experienced the firestorm that night, including my own. We saw the extensive destruction that resulted, and the initial shock, denial and sense of loss experienced by town residents. We also saw a little of how their experiences of attachment to their homes, possessions, pets and place were affected by the destruction.

Marysville was almost totally destroyed by the firestorm that swept through the town on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009 as shown in **Figure 5.1** below. Everyone was in shock; news travelled around the globe. The Black Saturday fires involved the greatest loss of life in an acute natural disaster in Australia's history, with 173 people later confirmed dead, and many hundreds more injured. Australia, and indeed the world, was stunned. In this chapter we look more closely at the extent of what was lost in the fires, we examine what took place in the first eight weeks of the initial response phase, and we consider what survivors experienced during that time from the perspective of attachment, loss and grief.

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<sup>91</sup> Source: <http://nateanton.com/10-quotes-better-understand-human-rights/>



**Figure 5.1:** Marysville post-Black Saturday, looking from the western end of town towards the east. Note the three surviving homes at lower left. Four people died in two of the burnt-out properties at lower centre.<sup>92</sup>

As this chapter explains, the sudden destruction left survivors with a strong immediate need to process their loss and to re-establish their attachment connections by seeking physical proximity and re-connection with their attachment figures and objects. As we saw in Chapter Two, the literature refers to this as a combination of ‘appraisal’ and ‘searching’ behaviour. Its importance has been noted in some, but not much, of the loss and grief literature. The need for expression of such appraisal and searching behaviour was sensed naturally by many who survived the fires. This chapter explores, *inter-alia*, what happens when that behaviour is blocked.

Further, this chapter explores how the interaction between people’s appraisal and searching behaviour and governmental responses and interventions (based upon the ‘chaos, command and control’ model also described in Chapter Two) detrimentally affected survivors. It will be seen that many of these interventions constituted physical barriers, and while they aimed to secure control of the fire-ground, in so doing they prevented people from seeking proximity to their attachment figures and objects. This led to anger, frustration, distrust and additional trauma for many survivors who sought to undertake their necessary appraisal and searching behaviour. Indeed, as we shall see, people’s need to see what remained of their secure base, and to search out their

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<sup>92</sup> Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/ftimages/2009/02/14/1234028347522.html>  
Image: Simon O’Dwyer.

attachment figures and objects, was so strong that it led many to find ways to circumvent government barriers and restrictions. As seen in the interviews, many people expressed their anger in terms of their inherent right to engage in this behaviour (even though they were not consciously aware of what it was they were doing). In relation to their homes and other possessions, this right not only included the mere notion of property rights, but also extended well beyond, reflecting a more fundamental human right and need to be able to ‘go home’ – to return to their secure base.

The remainder of this chapter is focused upon illustrating these key observations. It builds upon the examination of the effect of the fires on people’s attachments and sense of a secure base (as presented in Chapter Four) by describing the immediate aftermath of the bushfires for residents of Marysville. It then investigates the ways that people experienced the governmental response and interventions as barriers to their appraisal and searching behaviour, and considers their emotional and behavioural reactions to having this fundamental need frustrated. These reactions were still being felt at the time of interviewing, and for some, have remained with them to this day.

Immediately post-fire, survivors recoiled in shock from their experience of the sudden and rapid death of friends, and in some cases, family members too. Their homes, possessions and town were all swept away within the space of three hours and the town’s population dispersed across Victoria. Lives and long-term attachments were literally lost overnight. The effects of the fire upon the buildings of Marysville are shown on the map at **Figure 5.2** below. The post-fire period of eight weeks has been chosen as it encompasses the initial six-week lock-out period, followed by the two-week period where Marysville residents could spend time on their properties grieving, appraising and searching before the clean-up of the town commenced in earnest.

### **Marysville after Black Saturday – the Aftermath**

On Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, Marysville was a barely recognisable smoking ruin. It looked as if it had been carpet-bombed; the only thing missing were the bomb craters.

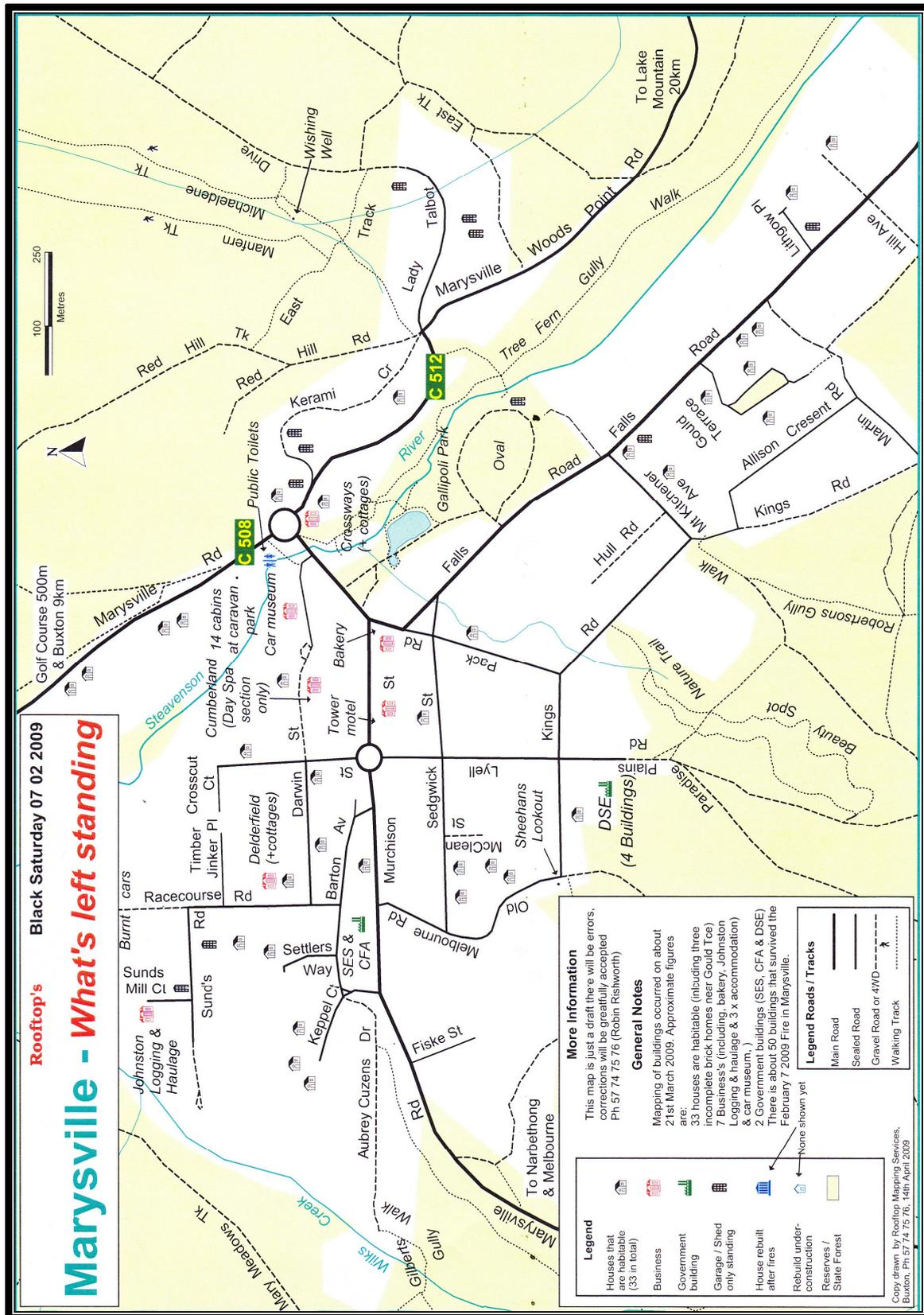


Figure 5.2: Marysville post-Black Saturday showing the location of the approximately 50 structures remaining of over 550 pre-fire buildings.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Source: Rishworth, (2009).

In the central business district of Marysville there was not one building left standing on the northern side of the main thoroughfare, Murchison Street. On the southern side of Murchison Street, only the Bakery and the Tower Motel survived. There was nothing else left. The effects on the main street are shown in **Figures 5.3 to 5.10** below, moving from the eastern end of Murchison Street, through to the western end of town. As can be seen from the images below, the face of Marysville was radically altered by the fires. All that people had known before was well-nigh eradicated, seriously affecting, indeed shattering their sense of place. Of a town of over 550 buildings<sup>94</sup> there were only 33 homes left, randomly scattered throughout the town, some solid brick, some timber clad, some old fibro, the pattern of survival being capricious. Seven buildings that I know of survived through the valiant efforts of their owners who stayed behind to defend them, yet others attempting the same thing perished, along with their burning homes. In stark contrast, many buildings were left unattended yet survived almost untouched, their owners having earlier fled.

### **The Initial Emergency Response to the Fire**

Sunday morning in Alexandra saw many Marysville residents in the main street. There was much confusion; everyone was in shock and disbelief. Nobody really knew what had happened or what was going on. Word about the fate of Marysville rapidly spread. After the fire event, and during the first days and following weeks, many survivors that I spoke with experienced confusion, disorientation and a lack of information. We did not know what was happening or who was dead or alive. We were psychologically stretched, emotionally devastated and physically exhausted.

The normal human grief response to such news usually emerges as a series of stages (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Once the news has been heard and the initial shock acknowledged, the normal reaction to severe loss commences with denial (*'no, it can't be true'*), then disbelief, wanting to know if it is really true (*'are you sure?'*), making an immediate appraisal of the situation (*'how do you know it's true?'*) and commencing an urgent search for what is now allegedly lost (*'I must get there as soon as I can and see for myself'*). Normal reactions are to: first, seek confirmation of the news, secondly to see if there is anything that can still be saved, and thirdly, to

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<sup>94</sup> This was the total number of structures, as distinct from about 489 dwellings, or residential homes.

recover any remains of loved ones or loved items (Bowlby, 1979a, 1988; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1969, 1986; Worden, 2010).



**Figure 5.3:** Pre-7/2/09, looking west up Murchison St, from the Corner Cupboard Café, Manical Mechanicals, Reddrops Foodworks, and the pointed red roof of the In-Neutral Restaurant (the old Marysville Picture Theatre).<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 5.4:** 8/2/09, the same view showing the destroyed Corner Cupboard Café, Manical Mechanicals, Reddrops Foodworks, and the pointed roof of the In-Neutral Restaurant.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Source: <http://www.manicalmechanicals.com/> Image: Alistair Mackie.

<sup>96</sup> Source: <http://www.manicalmechanicals.com/> Image: Alistair Mackie.



**Figure 5.5:** Murchison St. pre-7/2/09. L to R: In-Neutral Restaurant, Reddrops Foodworks, Manical Mechanicals and the Corner Cupboard Café.<sup>97</sup>



**Figure 5.6:** Murchison St. 8/2/09. L to R: The concrete walls of the In-Neutral Restaurant at left, and the collapsed roof of Reddrops Foodworks.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Source: <http://www.travelvictoria.com.au/marysville/photos/>

<sup>98</sup> Source: <http://images.watoday.com.au/2009/02/11/378625/article-marysville.jpg>



**Figure 5.7:** Murchison St. pre-7/2/09. L to R: the front picket fence of our property, Reddrops Service Station and Hardware Store, the grey roof of the Marysville Lolly Shop and the red roof line of the In-Neutral Restaurant. (Note the Gallipoli Park sign at centre-right was broken up and blown away in the high winds, with most of it landing in our backyard).<sup>99</sup>



**Figure 5.8:** Murchison St. 8/2/09. L to R: The remains of Reddrops Service Station and Hardware Store, the concrete walls of the Marysville Lolly Shop (Fred Barton's old home) and at far right the pointed roof of the In-Neutral Restaurant.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Source: <http://www.travelvictoria.com.au/marystville/photos/>

<sup>100</sup> Source: <http://resources1.news.com.au/images/2009/05/06/1225709/879401-devastated-marystville-after-the-black-saturday-bushfires.jpg> Image: Keith Pakenham.



**Figure 5.9:** Pre-7/2/09, the top, western end of Murchison Street, looking east, with the building known locally as the ‘top shops’ and Telstra tower to the right. Keppel’s Hotel is opposite left (out of view).<sup>101</sup>



**Figure 5.10:** 8/2/09, the top, western end of Murchison Street, looking east, with the remains of the ‘top shops’ to the right. Keppel’s Hotel, also totally destroyed, is opposite to the left.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Source: <http://www.travelvictoria.com.au/marysville/photos/>

<sup>102</sup> Source: [http://images.theage.com.au/ftage/ffximage/2009/02/11/cfa\\_4\\_gallery\\_600x399.jpg](http://images.theage.com.au/ftage/ffximage/2009/02/11/cfa_4_gallery_600x399.jpg)  
Image: Keith Pakenham.

Appraisal and searching behaviour is a natural part of initial and normal grief-related responses, although it would not usually be consciously recognised as such. Immediately after Black Saturday this is the behaviour that many survivors began to exhibit. For them, what happened next would thwart that human psychological response from taking its natural course.

There were a number of government interventions that immediately began to affect our lives. For the purposes of this research, I focus upon five of them, being, 1) roadblocks and the lock-out; 2) the removal of private motor vehicles; 3) the Marysville bus tour; 4) chimneys, further property damage and thefts; and 5) the Grocon clean-up. I chose these five, in chronological order, because from an attachment perspective they seem to have had the most effect upon me, and the survivors I interviewed. The frustrated appraisal and searching behaviours as experienced by survivors is explored through the examples of the above five interventions.

As would be expected, it is important to note that different individuals react to the loss of their secure base in different ways. However, in this study it would appear that the frustrating of much-needed appraisal and searching behaviour was the most dominant experience of people suffering from severed attachments in the fire's immediate post-impact phase, and hence is the focus of this examination. Whilst there were some counter-examples of expected appraisal and searching behaviour, these were in the minority.

### **Roadblocks and the Lock-out**

Discussions with many Marysville property owners showed that they expected to return to their homes, or what was left of them, once the fires had died down. However, much to our surprise, that was not permitted. Official roadblocks were set up and the community was locked-out of Marysville. This action, which came to be known by locals as 'the lock-out', was justified by the police by reference to the 'Crime Scene' provisions under Section 40(1) of the *Coroners Act*. The relevant sections of the Act state, *inter alia*, that the Coroner "may take reasonable steps to

restrict access to the place where the fire occurred.”<sup>103</sup> When I and many others queried this action we were told the justification was that the police were still searching for bodies.

The roadblocks and lock-out prevented people’s attempts to see what remained of their homes and to seek out loved ones, friends, neighbours, homes, treasured possessions and search for missing pets. The recovery of the bodies of dead pets was also prevented. People’s reactions to this included having to deviously find their way around the restrictions, or make direct appeals to the authorities. Nevertheless, for some survivors their frustration boiled over into anger contributing to additional trauma.

Yet within days of the fire some local residents had compiled a complete Excel spreadsheet listing of all the town residents with their contact numbers, which was readily available to all and provided to the authorities. By the end of the first week, we knew there was no one else missing, although there was the remote possibility of some tourists having perhaps sheltered in some houses. Given the circumstances of allegedly looking for bodies, and noting that within a couple of days no residents were any longer listed as missing, a complete lock-out of the town’s population did not seem “reasonable steps”, or even necessary. When some of us queried this action, the police simply said that if we disagreed, we could take it to Court for a ruling. Of course, no one had the time or energy to do that, and no one did. Many survivors felt a strong need to return to their places of attachment for the purposes of appraisal and searching. However, the authorities stymied their efforts in ways that many residents found to be, at best, insensitive. One survivor, Claire, said of their exclusion that she just felt:

Anger, just straight out anger. How dare they do this to us, on the pretext that it was forensics? Okay, in the beginning I could understand, yes, forensics needed to attend to those 34 bodies that were out there ... but I think that provision should still be made on a very strict basis that homeowners could have gathered on this day or that day and we will be let in, say 20, or however many, and take you to your home, because they had the ability to use the army, they had all the

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<sup>103</sup> **Source:** Parliament of Victoria. *Coroners Act 1985*. Division 2, Section 40, Clause (I), p 35. Now *Coroners Act 2008*. Division 4, Sections 37 & 38, pp. 31-32.

police here, they had other volunteer groups working here. I don't see why we couldn't have been given that right.

Claire correctly notes that there were many other people trawling through our properties, but the owners were not permitted to. Survivors were desperate to get back home and whilst this may seem to be just normal and natural behaviour, most do not understand the psychology behind it. As emphasised throughout this thesis, appraisal and searching behaviour occurs as an initial response to substantial loss. In addition, those whose homes had not burnt down, but who left Marysville, were then not allowed back home. This happened to numerous residents and was regarded as unfair, creating a great deal of stress and anxiety for local people who were desperate to be reunited with loved ones (to re-connect with important attachment figures) yet were prevented from doing so. People were already being denied<sup>104</sup> the opportunity to deal with their natural psychological distress in normal and effective ways by reconnecting with people and place, which is an essential element of human attachment need. The following two examples from unrecorded interviews, as captured in field notes, describe the experiences that some survivors went through to be reunited with their loved ones.

In the case of one husband and wife couple, Alan and Cathy, Alan had stayed behind to save the house, which he successfully managed to do. His wife Cathy had left early, going to Alexandra for safety. However, after the fire Cathy was not allowed through the roadblock to return to Alan (who was deeply distraught and distressed) until she obtained a Permit to Enter<sup>105</sup> over a week later. Both Alan and Cathy reported a great deal of long-term distress and anxiety as a result of this incident, having their need for attachment-seeking reconnection blocked.

For another husband and wife couple, André and Rachael (see page 121), Rachael had left on the day of the fire and was also later not allowed through the roadblock back to their home, which her husband André had successfully defended. So (according to

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<sup>104</sup> This is not to imply that such restrictions were deliberately implemented to cause psychological distress; they might have been put in place with the best of intentions. However, as we shall see later in this thesis, up until now the psychological harm caused by such restrictions has remained largely unidentified and unknown.

<sup>105</sup> During the 6-week period of the lock-out, certain people were granted a Permit to Enter if they had what the authorities considered to be a valid reason to enter or stay in Marysville. This mostly applied to tradespersons engaged in the repair of infrastructure, but rarely to property owners.

André) late one night at about 1.30am, when the police were asleep in their patrol cars, he drove to Alexandra past their cars, collected Rachael and together they drove back home again. Both Rachael and André were very annoyed and distressed that they had to go to such lengths simply to be reunited again. Rachael and André's attachment behaviour was strong enough for them to choose to work around the roadblocks and defy the authorities, regardless of the consequences.

We were told we were being kept out of Marysville because the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Teams were still looking for bodies. Yet we knew the DVI Teams had searched for bodies in Marysville in the first week, after which they departed to other areas of Victoria, like Kinglake. For three weeks the DVI Teams were not even in Marysville. Being given such egregious information further undermined our rapidly diminishing trust in the authorities. We knew we were being lied to; what else were we not being told? The sense of disempowerment deepened, and all the while we were made to wait. Essential appraisal and searching behaviours had to be suspended indefinitely, merely intensifying the sense of loss and helplessness.

Three weeks later (during which time we were still prevented from access to our properties) the police DVI Teams finally returned to Marysville for another ten days. Without contacting the property owners (as required under Section 41 of the *Coroners Act*), the police DVI Teams set about again allegedly searching for bodies (even well after everyone had been accounted for). They engaged contractors to rummage through people's properties in a process that included driving excavators through what remained of people's homes. The police told us this was to "make the properties safe". The police finally ended their 'search' and allowed the town to be re-opened on Wednesday, 18/3/09.

The DVI Teams were acting independently of property owners and thereby in breach of Section 41(4) of the *Coroners Act 1985*, which requires them to give, prior to entry, "a copy of the authority to the owner or occupier of the place" (Parliament of Victoria, 1985: 36). That was not done – no contact was ever made with property owners. The reason given to me by the police was that they "didn't have time". I note that Sections 61(1) and 62 of the *Coroners Act 1985* provides protection for any

person acting under the Coroner's powers, in that, "Neither the coroner nor a person acting under an authority given under this Act is liable to any legal proceedings in relation to anything done under this Act, unless it was done in bad faith" (Parliament of Victoria, 1985: 46). This clause essentially absolves and indemnifies the police from any accountability or liability. This disempowerment negatively affected survivors' property rights, their human dignity and their trust in the authorities.

During the six-week lock-out period, and following much community demand, the police finally allowed brief escorted visits to our properties. I was escorted to my property by two police officers. I was allowed to look but not touch. At that time I noted that my property had not had any machinery driven through it. Being allowed to access my property under police escort was the most frustrating and humiliating experience imaginable. I felt I was being treated like a criminal, being threatened by hawkish police, and under orders not to touch anything. Yet all I desperately wanted to do was sit with the ruins of my home and search for any remaining surviving items. I found this experience confronting, degrading, and very stressful.

There were also other police blockades in the general area. The Maroondah Highway through the Black Spur was closed, even though it was not blocked by debris, nor did it constitute a danger to public safety. The road was only unsafe for a week whilst the fire went through, and after repairs were made to the road it was safe and trafficable. Yet for many weeks Marysville residents who were travelling to numerous meetings and relief centres were forced to travel hundreds of unnecessary extra kilometres (via Yea to Alexandra).<sup>106</sup> This additional travel burden made all the more difficult our attempts to support and bond with each other, to re-attach to our community, and to take ownership of our situation. It exacerbated the distress of many survivors and left us feeling deserted and unsupported. As Colleen put it, "You know, that was just so frustrating; all that needless extra driving we had to do, and for what? – nothing, no reason at all." Despite the road over the Black Spur having been reopened some weeks later, Marysville itself remained locked-down and entry was prohibited for most. As many community members struggled to come to terms with what had happened, and was now happening, people began to self-organise and community meetings were initiated, with one group eventually becoming the Marysville and

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<sup>106</sup> Coldstream to Marysville is 52 kilometres. Coldstream to Marysville via Yea and Alexandra is 142 kilometres, an extra 90 kilometres (180 kilometres both ways) that we had to travel for no reason.

Triangle Development Group (MTDG) of which I was a foundation member, but from which I later had to withdraw. The role of the MTDG is further discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

I was not the only one traumatised by the lock-out period. At that time I too did not realise that the source of my anger and frustration was my blocked need to exercise appraisal and searching behaviour, and to protect what remained of my attachments and secure base from interference from others. From what I later observed, many others shared that experience too. Colin and Lyn survived Black Saturday in Marysville overnight on Gallipoli Park Oval. They visited the remains of their home on Sunday morning (8/2/09) before having to leave town. Colin and Lyn described their feelings about the roadblocks and lock-out:

Colin: Anger and resentment.

Lyn: Particularly when we saw people that were in there, and we also saw from the photos that we took on the Sunday morning initially, it was very different to what we saw when we were first allowed in.

Colin: Stuff had been interfered with. Now, you may say that that had to do with the fact that they were looking for bodies, etc, and that's true, but we found our burnt-out filing cabinet was standing upright and there was no reason for anybody to go near that. When we came back some eight weeks later the drawer had been forced open and stuff obviously gone through.

Lyn: And I think that caused half the problem and that's why a lot of the people have not gone back because we didn't get to bond again. That sounds silly I think, but if we had been – we knew what had happened to our place and if we were allowed to go back we could have started going through stuff getting our heads around it and ...

Colin: And people could have been helping each other instead of it becoming really bitter and nasty ...

It's important to note that Colin and Lyn picked up on the negative effects of the missed opportunities for community bonding because residents were kept in isolation from each other by government intervention for so long. If people had been allowed earlier access then they would have been able to come together as a community for mutual support, rather than being kept separated. Some people even made their decision not to return to Marysville at all after being locked-out during that six-week

period. Eventually, when the lock-out finally ended, Colin and Lyn described their feelings when they finally returned to their property:

Lyn: It was devastating.  
Colin: I think it was more a matter of seeing what appeared to us like an invasion of the site, if that makes sense, yeah. You felt like you'd been robbed, like a person who's been burgled, probably.  
Lyn: Violated.  
Colin: Yeah, that'll do, that's a good word, violated, yeah.  
Lyn: And yeah, they sure had made a mess.  
David: That relates to the question of the DVI teams and how your property was further damaged as a result, and how you felt about that. You've said you felt quite angry and violated.  
Colin: Yeah, probably both anger and yeah... anger as a result of being violated.

Once the lock-out had ended, many returning property owners that I spoke to reported looting from their properties. I had expressed my concern to police about not being able to return to my property to protect against damage and looting. I had received assurances from the police that they would protect our properties for us; however, that did not occur. When Mike was finally allowed onto his property he found that his car, which remarkably had not been burnt, had been robbed: "I actually had a vehicle that didn't burn and there was stuff stolen out of it ... a brand-spanking-new brushcutter."

Shane and Barbara (see page 122), who survived the fire in Marysville sheltering in their car, spoke of their frustrating and distressing experience when they tried to return to their property to recover some tools and their dog trailer, and to bury their dogs that had perished in the house:

Shane: Anyway, we came up from Melbourne, we went right up through Yea and across to the Buxton Road, and then some stupid bloody female sergeant came down and I said, "I'm just going to get my stuff in my garage – my chainsaws and that, and my dog trailer. I haven't got my dogs, but someone will knock it off," and she said, "Well, you can't go." She said, "You can't go that way. We've closed the town," – they blamed it on the...  
Barbara: Coroner's Office.

Shane: – Coroner’s Office, so they said, “You can’t go in.” I said “This is bullshit. We were there. We’ve come out. We just want to go back in again and just get the trailer.” Anyway, she wouldn’t let us, you know, she nearly drew her bloody gun on me – well, she didn’t. She said, “Go back to Alexandra and see.” Anyway, we did, and I went in there and there was about six senior officers and there was a bloke in front of me who was really angry and I got in there – anyway, I came out of there, and I rang the bloody Coroner’s Office, and I said, “I want to speak to the Coroner.” They said, “She’s not in,” and I said, “Who is in?” I got the 2IC, some bloke or something, I forget his name. Anyway, I told him, I said, “Listen, the police up here are saying that you closed the bloody town and I can’t go – ” I explained the situation. He said, “They’re blaming us?” I said, “Yeah, that’s what they’re saying; you’ve done it.” I said, “I’m up in Alex. I want to go back and get my dog trailer.”

Barbara: It was actually true, because they’re the ones that declared it a crime scene.

Shane: Anyway, he said, “I’ll ring you back.” I said, “When?” Like, I’m sitting here – He said, “I’ll ring you back in five minutes.” Anyway, ten minutes later, the phone rang, I was in the middle of nowhere, and he said, “You’re going to have to go back to Melbourne. There’s some protocols to go through here. I’m sorry about this, but leave it with me, I promise someone’ll ring you tomorrow.” [*Shane was later told that a police officer would meet him at the roadblock.*] So the next day, some high guy from the police said, “If you want to go up and get your dog trailer, you can go up any time you like.” So the next day, I went up and I came up to the thing, [*the roadblock*] and the policewoman came out and she said “Oh, Mr \*\*\*\*\*.”

Barbara: They saw the registration number. We had to give them the registration number.

Shane: Anyway, I got in, I got my trailer.

Barbara: That was actually hard, because our dogs’ remains were rotting away in the sun and we weren’t allowed to touch anything. It was a terrible smell.

David: Did the police go in with you?

Shane: No.

David: No? They just let you go in.

Barbara: Yeah, just let us go in. I mean, we respected everything, you know, didn’t touch anything, but it would have been nice to bury our dogs then. We could smell them and see where they were, what was left of them. We certainly didn’t go poking around anybody else’s property.

Shane: Over the months that came after that, because I’ve done a lot of work with people and groups, and sensitivity groups, and Cairnmillar,<sup>107</sup> and all that stuff, a quarter of

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<sup>107</sup> The Cairnmillar Institute is a Melbourne-based organisation founded in 1961 that provides training and education in counselling, psychotherapy and trauma therapy. See also: <https://www.cairnmillar.edu.au/about-us/our-history/>

a century of it, there seemed to me to be no cognisance of the people-reaction. You have all these bloody rules, "Don't do this" – I mean, I've been there, I'd experienced it, I nearly lost my life and neighbours, and I'm not allowed to walk over my own property, whereas some bloody 18-year-old bloody snotty-nosed Army cadets, they can do it with their thing and, y'know... I seethed – I seethed.

Barbara: I was pretty pissed off when they offered the bus trip. I think that's just an insult.

Shane: And the bloody bus trip and people walking and they're not allowed to get out. You see other countries, so called – we call them 'backward communities'...

Barbara: Some people thought that was okay.

Shane: They had people crawling over ... now, I'm not saying – there's safety concerns and all that, but people need to experience and touch things and see the death, and see it themselves; not some other person saying, "Listen, you can't see this. You'll get upset." It's bullshit, and it's still bullshit to this day. So I think they handled it very poorly. The whole thing from a people point of view, from the ability of people to experience and work through their pain and their grief and their anguish, in my opinion, it was the opposite to what you should do. It was just bullshit.

David: Well, it's a really interesting thing, what it is that actually sparks that anger. Have you got to the bottom of that, of what it is that you're actually really angry about?

Shane: Well, it's about authorities' lack of, what I call, people compassion – it's almost ignorance – about what – as I said to you before, we look at many things that happen overseas, and I'm not suggesting we should do what they do, but like what we call 'Oh, backward country. They haven't got a clue.'

If a disaster happens and people are crawling all over through it, they're pulling people out, they're in danger for sure, but I'd suggest that those people deal with it a lot better than a lot of the people here do, because what the authorities do here is just – you know, they treat you like a bloody moron – "Get over there," "Don't see it," "We'll tell you about it," "You can't go to your house, your property, your dogs." You can't see anything, you can't experience anything.

As I say, I've been doing it for 25 years with groups for Cairnmillar, and what we call their 'Sensitivity Group' – they're about feelings; they're about experience and changing your life through your feeling dimension. What these people do is cut all the bloody feeling off and the touch, and then leave you standing like a shag on a rock. And I think somewhere in all that, that's what I get angry about; it's that ignorance about how to handle people.

David: It's interesting, that, because I think that's about them, rather than about us, because it allows them to handle it themselves more easily –

Shane: Yeah, that's right. I see what you mean.

David: – so it's actually about their coping, not about our coping, and I think that's a problem.

In one brief exchange, Shane and Barbara's detailed experiences have highlighted many of the issues that we as survivors encountered. Their revealing experiences show the importance of attachment behaviour for grieving over loss of place, pets, homes and environment. Government intervention unnecessarily interfered with and undermined important normal grieving processes related to appraisal, searching and grieving behaviours. Shane and Barbara's experiences highlight that fact, but they too were apparently unaware of the psychology behind their own behaviour other than vague descriptors of the feeling dimension. Further, their experiences highlight the frustration and pain felt by many in the community – that their needs and desires were either ignored, ridden roughshod over, or had to be fought for with great persistence. Eventually Shane and Barbara were allowed home without police accompaniment, so what was the point of not being allowed back in the first place? And why were some people given permission, and others like me denied such permission? Nevertheless, Shane and Barbara were still not permitted to bury their dogs which was something that caused them both a great deal of grief later on, and to this day.

It would appear that the denial of access (just in case people might get hurt or see something awful) actually denies survivors the experience of being able to feel and touch what has happened to them. From an attachment perspective, this stymies and delays their ability to process the disaster. So the questions must be asked, what really is the purpose of the lock-out system? Who does it work for and who benefits from it; the survivors or the authorities? I would suggest that for disaster survivors any 'lock-out' can be very damaging to their recovery. Another returning resident, interviewed on ABC radio, had this to say of the lock-out period:

It was an experience that we shouldn't needed [*sic*] to have gone through. It really upset me to have the land accessed by other people and invaded by other people and going through my private possessions and I was not allowed to be there and witness it even; it was like a psychological rape I'd have to say.

ABC Radio, 21/3/2009

Again, this Marysville resident was very distressed that she was prohibited from going to her property whereas others who she didn't know were free to trawl through it. Two women, (see also Kellie below) spoke of feeling as if they had been raped. They clearly felt they had been violated, that their land and possessions had been defiled by not only the disaster but now by others, and they had no power or control over what was being done to them. Again, normal attachment responses are thwarted and disempowerment inflicted. On the same radio interview, another resident had this to say:

We were very anxious; we've been waiting six weeks for this day and we didn't even know as we were driving up if we would be allowed back in. ... I just had this huge sense of 'oh, thank goodness, we can now start to move forward'. This is like the day we can start to move on, for me.

ABC Radio, 21/3/2009

The above quotations show how much anxiety the lock-out provoked and of how the recovery process for Marysville survivors (of dealing with attachment, appraisal and searching behaviours) was delayed by being prevented from returning to their properties. However, while the above accounts provide insight into the experiences of some, the experiences of Les and Jenny Dovaston<sup>108</sup> of the Marysville Trout and Salmon Ponds were particularly traumatic. Les and Jenny, both aged in their mid-70's, are respected citizens who over the years have operated successful businesses, and made a great contribution to their local community. Their story is quite detailed and very revealing, yet too lengthy to include in full in the body of this thesis. It is attached as **Appendix H** and I provide a brief summary as follows.

Les, Jenny and their son Glen barely survived the fire with their lives. Whilst managing to save some of the trout farm infrastructure, most was lost, including their two homes and virtually all of their possessions, farm machinery and building materials. Les and Jenny left the farm the following day to get provisions in Healesville, including essential fuel to run the diesel-powered water aerators to keep their fish alive in the heat. Having first obtained permission from the police to be able

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<sup>108</sup> Les and Jenny have given permission for their real names to be used and for their story to be told. Jenny now has advanced dementia and, despite our having been friends for many years, no longer recognises me. She has recently been admitted to full-time care in a nursing home.

to return, they were then prevented from doing so in a very abrupt manner. Les and Jenny's account of their traumatic experience with a policeman just out of Healesville as they attempted to return home is astounding. Having been permitted to pass the first roadblock, they then encountered a second police car. Les got out of his car and approached the police car. This is what happened next:

Les: So they left the [*police car*] window down and then – they're into me about running the roadblock.

Jenny: Yes they accused us of...

Les: He said, "Get out of here immediately" and I said what the story was, how we got in there, and they wouldn't take any notice of it. [\*\*\*\*\*] was his name, Senior Constable, no – Superintendent, [\*\*\*\*\*]. I'll never forget his name. So driving back out I stopped and I got some sandwiches out of the back of the car. I was starving by this time and the adrenalin was sort of knocked out of us by then – Anyway the cop car came up alongside me.

Jenny: Really quickly. He must have been checking up on us.

Les: Put the brakes on and skid to a sort of stop and –

Jenny: Pulled our car – the keys out of the ignition.

Les: He put his hand in and took me car keys and they were going to take me to jail. I said, "Take me to jail. I'm stuffed anyway. I want to have a sleep," and...

Jenny: I was in a –

Les: Then Jenny...

Jenny: – State of...

Les: I've never seen her so upset in my life.

Jenny: It was terrible.

Les: She grabs the cop and he sort of – anyway, he give her back the keys and we went down to the roadblock and they let us out and this, Superintendent [\*\*\*\*\*] said to the bloke on the roadblock, "Don't ever let this person past this point ever again."

Jenny: Oh, we were treated like criminals.

Les: Now, every time I go past that point, I thought 'how could that bloke say that?' That 'never again am I allowed past this point'? So I was that annoyed. Oh, there was – a car came down. That's right. A car came down while we were sitting there and I stopped him and I said, "Where'd you come from?" "Oh," he said, "Narbethong." I said, "What's the road like?" he said, "Oh, it's alright." We took off and anyway we were kicked out and I – we – I went home, to our other place at Healesville ...

Les and Jenny's experience of abusive police treatment and the threat of jail for insisting they be allowed through the blockade is an example of some of the capricious behaviour that I am aware others also experienced.

Glen had also left the property earlier, was refused a Permit to Enter, and so was also locked out. Having eventually been permitted to return home, Les then had to later meet Glen at the roadblock so Glen could hand over some more jerrycans of diesel for the water-aerators. However, by the time they had returned a few days later, and enough fuel obtained to operate the water aerators, it was too late; over 100,000 fish had perished. What were they to do with them? Les rang the Environment Protection Authority for advice about what to do with the dead fish. He was threatened with huge fines and jail-time by a government official for "water pollution"; he just hung up the phone. Les and Jenny were not only traumatised and emotionally scarred by their treatment, they also lost hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of fish.

As with Les, Jenny and Glen, many others who had been given verbal permission to leave the lock-out zone, having been assured they would be allowed back in when they returned, were caught out by a shift-change in which the new shift of police officers would not then allow those people back in. For Les and Jenny, their disempowerment was very costly, not only in financial and business terms, but psychologically as well.

For another survivor, Audrey, finally being able to return to her home was a shock, not only because of the effects of the fire, but because of the additional damage that had been done after the fire by the authorities. This experience was very distressing:

David: What was your reaction when you finally got to see your property after the fire, after the lock-out and you got to walk back on to your block?

Audrey: Oh, it was worse than I thought it'd look. Fire just destroys everything. Just sifting through, there was nothing. Someone had gone along – I could have saved probably more things inside the house – but someone in a bulldozer had gone along and pushed down my firewall into the house so I had no chance of finding a thing and I think that was Council. They had no right and they bulldozed my Coonara<sup>109</sup> which

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<sup>109</sup> 'Coonara' is the brand name of an Australian-manufactured wood heater that uses firewood as fuel.

probably would've still been useable. It was a \$5,000 Coonara and they just bulldozed it into the house but, as I said before, mementos would have been good.

The opportunity for Audrey to undertake appraisal and searching behaviour in her property was totally eliminated by government interference, first from the unnecessary lock-out, and secondly from her property being bulldozed. Another survivor, Emily, who lived on a property a little to the north of Marysville (and who was not subject to the lock-out), had a different experience of the roadblocks. Emily was eventually allowed back home five days after the fire:

Emily: Yeah, coming back from Melbourne, yes. I got stopped in Taggerty for about an hour and a half. I thought it was ridiculous. I thought it was one of the most frustrating things and one of the most annoying and I think it hindered people helping each other. I'd spoken to George and Sarah;<sup>110</sup> they'd spent the entire time up here working on their property. They had the fire go through, they were running out of fuel, they were running out of equipment, they were running out of resources to keep the work up, they were running out of food. They couldn't leave because if they left, they weren't going to get back in.

David: So about what day was that, when you came back?

Emily: Thursday.

David: So you raced around, got yourself organised, got clothes, got money...?

Emily: Yep, had everything sorted by that point ... you just keep going through the list, 'boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, now I can get back.' And I was dying to get back.

Because of her location, Emily was fortunate at not being locked-out for too long. However, her enthusiasm and wanting to get back home as soon as possible is evident. People just wanted to be back on their properties to see how they'd fared and what needed to be done, especially if there were pets or livestock involved. Those who were already on their properties wanted to stay, but often had to leave to go to town for provisions, and in doing so were always afraid they would not be allowed back home. It would seem, however, that not everyone had a bad experience of the lock-out. Neil described his experience as follows:

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<sup>110</sup> Not their real names.

I can understand why the police did it and I wouldn't want to be here with the kids while there's bodies to be found and things like that. Can you imagine if a kid picked up a bit of metal and there's a bit of body underneath it or something like that? It had to be done. The police had to go through and make sure it was done properly.

About two weeks after the fires we were talking to police at the golf club and they said "Look, if you sign this bit of paper,<sup>111</sup> we'll take you to have a look at your house, see what you've got left." There were two police; we were in the back of the police car and they drove up. We were allowed to get out on the nature strip but that was all.

We just had a look just to see what we didn't have and what was left and then got back in the car. So we knew then. We knew we just had to wait until the police had done their work. It was something that had to be done. I know a lot of people were pretty peeved off about it but it had to be done. It should've been done.

Even though Neil did not seem to mind being taken in a police car to view the remains of his home, his experience again highlights the highly controlled nature of what occurred which affected people's ability to connect with their homes and to grieve over their loss. Neil was able to satisfy his initial appraisal behaviour, but searching behaviour was still to be delayed.

To conclude, perhaps the most strident comment was made by Kellie, who said to me: "We were stripped of our rights. Being locked out was like being in a war and having survived and then being bent over the table and raped by your own side." From what Kellie said, she was keenly feeling the effects of her attachment needs being thwarted. Many survivors just wanted to see what had happened to their properties, and to reconnect with their neighbours and friends. The roadblocks and lock-out also prevented people from reconnecting with others in the community through community meetings and relief centres. For others I interviewed, the not knowing what was happening and the inability to reconnect with others proved detrimental (see Gallagher, et al., 2016). A high proportion of those interviewed reported that the negative and distressing effects of the lock-out and roadblocks have remained with them to this day. Of all the immediate post-fire experiences, it would seem that it is the lock-out that has had the most traumatic, damaging and enduring long-term effects upon many Marysville bushfire survivors.

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<sup>111</sup> The 'bit of paper' Neil refers to was a waiver document that the police were trying to get people to sign to absolve the police and government of any responsibility or future legal recourse. Apparently, Neil signed the document. I too was asked to sign such a document, and I refused.

By comparing people's experiences and considering the literature in detail, I have concluded this commonly shared trauma is a direct result of loss and grief-related appraisal and searching behaviours being blocked. I have deliberately focused upon the lock-out event in detail as it shows how government interventions immediately began to thwart and prevent important human appraisal and searching behaviour, a vital first step in processing loss and grief. The lock-out also begins to show the emerging disempowerment of individuals and communities and the effect that had upon them. Finally, it alludes to the importance of the other five attachment factors we have discussed thus far, being attachment to people, possessions, pets, place and participation.

Many people indicated they felt they had a right to get back to loved ones, their homes, their possessions and their pets. They placed great importance on their ability to engage in appraisal and searching behaviour, even though at the time they were quite unaware this is what they were doing (and many remain unaware to this day). The disregard for and lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the need for this behaviour (and indeed, even of its very existence) undermined relationships. Trust in the police and other authorities was damaged then, and into the future.

### **The Removal of Private Motor Vehicles**

Towards the end of the first week after the fire, without any consultation, permission or advice, all of the burnt vehicles in the town (about 250 vehicles) were collected and taken to a central holding area at the old Racecourse Road sawmill site, including our car as shown in **Figure 5.11** below. Some vehicles were dragged out of people's burnt garages, and in one case, included a vintage car undergoing restoration. This again was to affect survivors' need for appraisal and searching behaviour, and contributed to the now growing sense of disorientation, loss of control, frustration, anger and disempowerment on the part of locals. In this unilateral action (about which there was no public discussion), privately owned burnt vehicles, whether insured or uninsured, were all collected without contact being made with the owner. In my discussions with many survivors, although the vehicles were destroyed, we believed the authorities had no right to take the course of action they did without first contacting the owners. After

all, the vehicles did remain the property of their owners and, for the most part, were located on private property.<sup>112</sup>



**Figure 5.11:** Our 1996 Nissan Pathfinder, as I eventually found it amongst all the other wrecks. It took me a great deal of time to locate it. The authorities provided no information about the removal or location of our motor vehicles – they just vanished.<sup>113</sup>

An emerging theme for many property owners was that they felt their property and ownership rights were violated, if not forfeited. Despite the fact that we wanted control over our own affairs we were excluded from many decisions that directly affected us. What was happening to us and to our properties was beyond our control. It was clear that the authorities were not going to make contact with property owners and things were just going to happen. This is a theme of the following weeks and it seemed to continue for months afterwards.

Some were not bothered by the collection of all the burnt vehicles and having them lined up in rows at the old mill site. For others this action exacerbated the trauma. In terms of the grief and healing process, many of us survivors felt it was important to see our things (the ‘body’) as soon as possible, and to find them where we had left them, including our motor vehicles (more appraisal and searching behaviour). When

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<sup>112</sup> Note that no State of Disaster or State of Emergency had been declared giving authorities additional powers to enter private property or to remove personal property.

<sup>113</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: David Barton.

we were finally allowed back in, all of our cars were just gone, and nobody told us what had happened to them or where they were. This in itself I found very distressing. I too wanted to know what had happened to our car and where it had gone. In retrospect, I can see that my own appraisal and searching behaviour was affected. I had a desire, a need, to be able to go home as soon as possible and to find everything as I had left it. For most of the Marysville population, this is not what occurred. Another couple, Colin and Lyn, were also distressed at what happened with the motor vehicles, as described below:

Lyn: Invaded, I'd have to say – invaded.  
Colin: Yeah. Look, I know that the garage was burnt beyond repair. I'd seen it ballooned out, but the door was closed at the front. ... When we saw that somebody had just basically pulled that door off and dragged the vehicle out and it was – we weren't told where it was, I suppose I felt...  
Lyn: Angry.  
Colin: Angry, yeah. I felt angry. I could understand it, though.  
Lyn: But we weren't told why or where the vehicle was. We'd been for the drive back into town a week later on the buses and hmm, what happened there? It wasn't like that when we left.

As with many of us, Colin and Lyn expected things on their property to be left as they had last seen them. We all did, but that did not happen. Another survivor, Mike, was quite blunt with his assessment of the collection of the burnt motor vehicles: “Stupid. Why? A waste of money and time. It's got nothing to do with forensics.” Mike was angry and just thought it was pointless, whereas two other survivors, Simon and Gwen, who were living in Marysville immediately post-fire, were ambivalent about the collection of burnt motor vehicles, but were nevertheless aware of the eerie and disturbing effects of that activity:

Simon: We didn't have a vehicle for them to collect up. But, again, yeah, that's something that probably had to happen. So we knew about it I think ... and then we actually saw it, because they were at the bottom of Delderfield<sup>114</sup> at the old mill, and that was

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<sup>114</sup> 'Delderfield' is a bed and breakfast guesthouse accommodation facility in Marysville that survived the fires with some damage that was soon repaired. It has recently closed as the owners have retired. See <http://www.delderfield.com.au/>

actually one of the memories that I have, that I remembered being quite disturbing seeing all those vehicles and knowing some of them had marks on them.

I thought that was a mark that someone's died in one, or that they've found one ...

There was also an eeriness that went on for a couple of weeks afterwards that the police would do patrols around those vehicles around the town. Of course there's nothing else on in the town and you'd see their lights. That was a little bit disturbing.

Gwen: I think now I've got rid of all of that.

Simon: I remember it. It hasn't disturbed me now.

Simon and Gwen didn't have a burnt-out car, so were not directly affected by it (hence no appraisal or searching behaviour required), yet it was still an eerie and surreal situation for them to witness. This action by the authorities highlights the lack of communication that was occurring, even with the few remaining people who were living in Marysville at that time. Another survivor, Neil, highlighted the disturbing ugliness of the rows of burnt cars: "I suppose they had to be taken somewhere than just leaving them all around the streets and they were down at the old mill site, but if you didn't want to see it then don't go down there. It did look pretty scary. It was a horrible scene." Perhaps those responsible for the removal of the vehicles were not aware of the effect that this gruesome parade of lined-up dead vehicles had upon the wellbeing of the townspeople. This example again illustrates how attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour was affected by government intervention, and of how the sense of disempowerment of survivors and property owners was becoming more deeply entrenched. It would appear that rather than easing the pain of survivors, these activities of the authorities were actually deepening it.

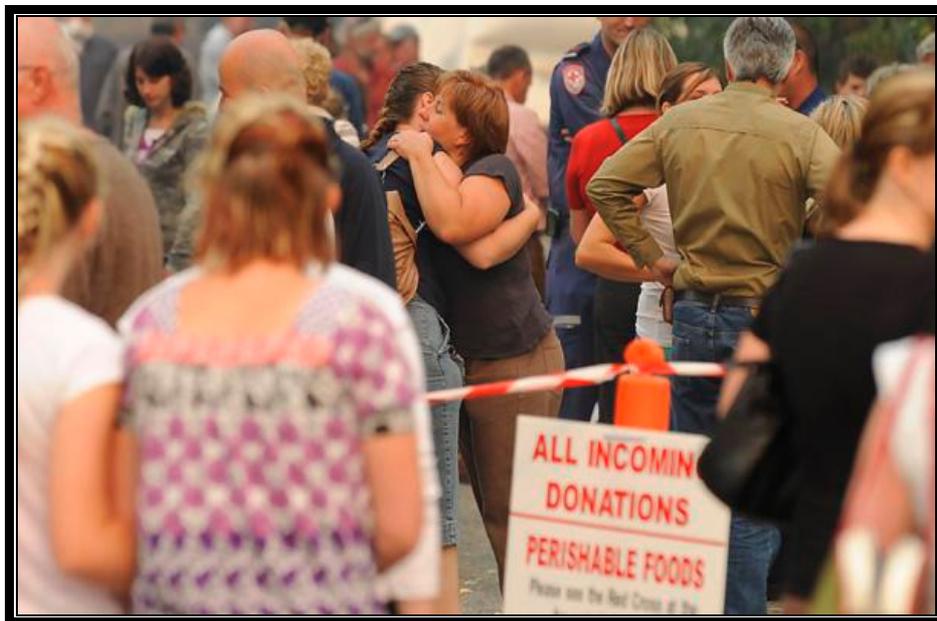
### **The Marysville Bus Tour**

As a result of complaints about the lock-out, the authorities arranged for a number of buses to ferry residents back to Marysville on Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, to have a look at the town, as shown in **Figures 5.12 to 5.14** below. Gathering at the Buxton Reserve, it was for many of us the first time we had seen each other since the day of the fire. It was a very emotional day.

Despite the fact that many family members had come to support their relatives, the authorities made it very clear that only Marysville residents would be permitted on the

buses (thus denying many survivors the comfort and support from family and friends). We were also told the buses would be in street groups, and each bus would only visit those streets of the people on that bus. Extraordinary as it may seem, and for reasons that went unexplained, the taking of photographs was strictly forbidden and all phones and cameras had to be switched off and put away. A police officer was on each bus to ensure that the rules were obeyed. I often wonder who came up with all these procedures, on what basis they were formulated, and what purpose they were meant to serve.<sup>115</sup>

In reality, for survivors participating in this exercise, the bus tour itself and the arbitrary rules applied were very counter-productive and presented even more blockages for survivors attempting to express normal loss and grief behaviours. The rules sterilised the whole experience and denied people the very support they needed to process their loss and grief. In any event, many of the rules were not adhered to anyway. Our sense of control, empowerment, self-management and wellbeing were all very compromised.



**Figure 5.12:** Post-fire Marysville residents greeting each other at the Buxton Reserve on 14/2/09 in preparation for the bus trip into Marysville. I am in the khaki shirt with my back to the camera.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> It seemed to us very odd that only a week earlier, and in the absence of the authorities, many of us had to use our own initiative to save our lives and the lives of others. Then, a week later at the bus tour, we were being told what we could and couldn't do, and were being herded around like incapable sheep by those same authorities who were absent on the day of the fires. It was very disempowering.

<sup>116</sup> Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/photogallery/2009/02/14/1234028349652.html>  
Image: Sebastian Costanzo.



**Figure 5.13:** Post-fire Marysville residents filing on to one of the buses in preparation for the trip into Marysville on 14/2/09. Note the counsellors and officials in high-visibility vests at upper right.<sup>117</sup>



**Figure 5.14:** The buses depart from Buxton to visit post-fire Marysville on 14/2/09. Note the heavy police presence and the ambulance following the buses (we presume just in case anyone had an adverse reaction to what they might see). This is the same intersection where only a week earlier I had, as an SES volunteer, been directing traffic as people fled the area in the face of the advancing fire.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Source:

[http://images.theage.com.au/ftage/ffximage/2009/02/14/th\\_marysville1\\_gallery\\_586x400.jpg](http://images.theage.com.au/ftage/ffximage/2009/02/14/th_marysville1_gallery_586x400.jpg)

Image: Simon O'Dwyer.

<sup>118</sup> Source: [http://images.theage.com.au/2009/02/14/382988/wr\\_420\\_marysville.jpg](http://images.theage.com.au/2009/02/14/382988/wr_420_marysville.jpg)

Image: Sebastian Costanzo.

Our trip into Marysville was very sombre. There were many tears. The bus drivers were very good, and, contrary to the police orders, gave us a tour of the whole town. The police officer on board said nothing and was quite emotionally overcome; she was in tears, needing comforting herself. We were shocked by what we saw. The bus was not allowed to stop, nor were we allowed to get off for any reason at all. An ambulance trailed behind us. In Marysville we were greeted by people standing by the side of the roads who were still living in town. They waved to us; we waved back. Their homes had not burnt down and yet they were not allowed out of the town, or they would not be allowed back in again. We were not allowed to stop and talk to them; it was surreal. This is how one interviewee, Brent (see page 125), recalled the bus journey back into Marysville:

We drove in the bus, and we weren't allowed out. Yeah, we weren't allowed out of the bus and it drove up Falls Road. We're going to do Falls Road and come down Kings Road and that's all you're going to see. But the bus ended up driving all around. And ... here's my washing machine and my dryer standing one on top of the other in the middle of my block. And my ladder that I'd had leaning against a stack of bricks in my shed wall was still standing up, and the rest was – there was nothing. And I just thought – I'd actually said – they said, "Nobody under any circumstances is allowed to get off the bus." And I remember saying to this young police lady. She was in tears, she was – she'd only just finished her training and was sent down from Canberra to work in Marysville and help the recovery and stuff. And I said, "Look," I said, "My cat" – I said, "Don't ask me why," I said, "I really feel my cat ... he made it." And I said, "If we happen to see him," I said, "I want to get out." She said, "We can't stop the bus." And I thought, okay. My plan was, if I spot him, I'm just going to say, "Please stop the bus. I'm going to throw up." And I would have jumped off and got him. I had it all worked out. But I didn't see him.

Brent was clearly worried about his cat, yet was prevented from searching for him. He had not been allowed back into town to carry out an appraisal of his property or to search for his pet. Even his identification of his washing machine and dryer shows an element of appraisal and searching behaviour. Fortunately, Brent's cat eventually showed up, scorched and thin, many weeks later.

But the bigger question remained: Why couldn't we go in to our own town ourselves? Why couldn't we see it or touch it for ourselves? The bus tour and hands-off approach made the pain, the sense of loss and grief, and the waiting just that much harder. Our

innate appraisal and searching behaviours were further frustrated, exacerbating our growing sense of isolation and powerlessness. Contrast this highly controlled and regimented approach to that of some supposedly “backward communities”, as mentioned in Shane’s earlier account on page 147, where survivors of natural disasters are often seen in the media essentially doing as they please amongst the ruins, unconstrained by, and often in cooperation with the authorities. They are free to indulge in appraisal and searching behaviour and perhaps suffer less psychological harm as a result.<sup>119</sup>

We arrived back at Buxton to the waiting television cameras and media frenzy. It was a very distressing time. We said our goodbyes, dispersed, and went back to our isolated locations where each of us had found at least some temporary shelter. All that the survivors on the bus tour wanted was to go back to their homes by themselves to look at what remained, to see what they could find, and look for their animals. In hindsight, the seemingly well-intentioned bus tour in reality had the effect of contributing towards blocked expressions of grief, a thwarted desire to be home, more blocked appraisal and searching behaviours, continuing trauma and an already emerging sense of isolation, disattachment and powerlessness.

### **Chimneys, further Property Damage and Thefts**

In addition to the lock-out, the collection of our motor vehicles and the traumatising bus tour, we were now about to receive the worst assault upon our blocked experience of loss and grief and to our frustrated appraisal and searching behaviour. This was the destruction by the authorities of what little remained of our secure base, before we even had a chance to look at it.

Amongst the very few photographs I now have of our home before it burnt down is the one shown at **Figure 5.15** below. At the time that photo was taken, in about September, 2007, extensive renovations had been completed. Our antiques shop was soon opened and operated for a year, up until December, 2008. We had invested a lot of time and money into that property and it was full of valuable antiques, collectables and personal items. However, almost four weeks after the fires (still during the lock-out period and two weeks before we were allowed back into Marysville) we received

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<sup>119</sup> This would make for a very interesting research project.

a letter from the Murrindindi Shire Council. The letter instructed property owners who may still have “damaged standing structures” on their properties to “make them safe” and to “demolish the structure or make the site safe within 48 hours” (MSC, 2009) of accessing our property. This was another hammer blow. For survivors like me this raised immediate questions about how much time we would have to locate valuables and retrieve precious items from our properties before the bulldozers moved in.



**Figure 5.15:** Our home and soon-to-be-opened antiques and collectables shop at 16 Murchison St., undergoing renovations in September, 2007. I completed all of this work myself.<sup>120</sup>

Many of those I spoke to wanted to ensure that what remained of our properties was preserved for long enough so we could have sufficient time searching through the rubble.<sup>121</sup> My anxiety levels rose. On more than one occasion I spoke with the Murrindindi Building Surveyor and was assured that my three chimneys had been assessed as being safe, as shown in **Figure 5.16** below, and not in need of immediate demolition. I later advised him that the demolition of chimneys and walls in Marysville had commenced. He replied that he had no knowledge of it and that he had not been consulted. Without explanation, during the lock-out period selective demolition work had commenced on properties within Marysville (yet not anywhere outside of the town) and no one had been told.

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<sup>120</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: Andrew Barton.

<sup>121</sup> Why was this even an issue? Why were we now no longer even in control of our own properties?

The traumas were now escalating; I was starting to feel quite violated, that my life and my property were no longer my own or within my control. Other anonymous people, who could not be identified or contacted, were simply treating my place and my property as their own; I was irrelevant to all that was being done to me, to what remained of my possessions, and to my place.



**Figure 5.16:** The burnt-out remains of our home and shop, two days after Black Saturday, showing the three chimneys standing, and my burnt-out trailer which I was later allowed to recover under police supervision.<sup>122</sup>

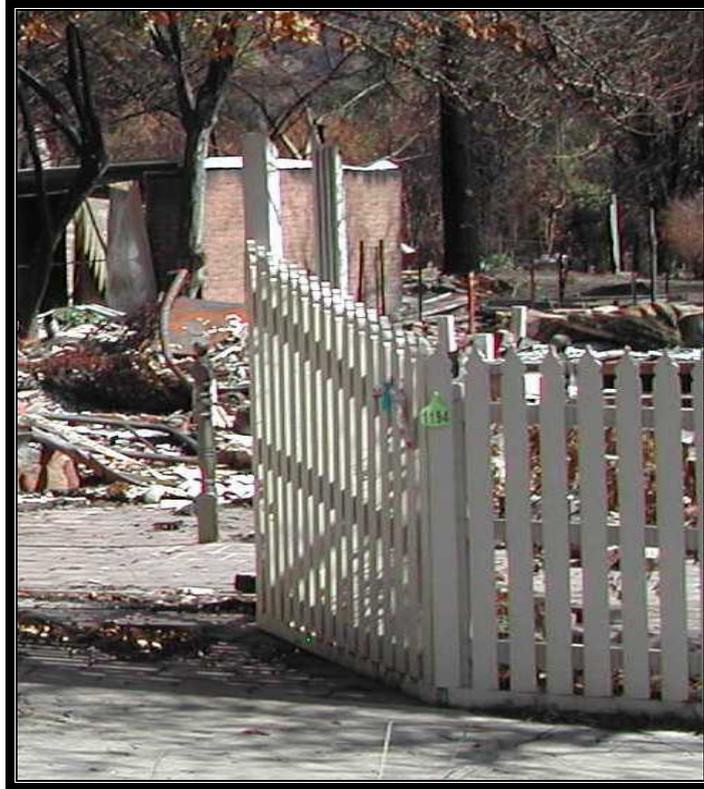
This was no more evident than the green cattle tag nailed to my front fence. I was now simply ‘property number 1194’, as shown in **Figure 5.17** below. The remains of my home were just that, remains; but sacred remains to me; a body, a grave that no longer held life, but a sacred place still in need of my protection, yet I was unable to protect it from further desecration.

The Deputy Police Commissioner, Kieran Walshe, told us at a town meeting that Marysville would be reopened on the evening of Friday 20/3/09 and many of us had planned accordingly. However, without any notice, it was announced on the radio that the town had been re-opened on the afternoon of Wednesday 18/3/09. This caused enormous problems for those of us who were now working in the city and had made

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<sup>122</sup> **Source:** The *Herald Sun*. 6/5/2009. Herald and Weekly Times. Vic.: News Corporation Australia.

preparations and arranged our schedules around going into Marysville on the Friday evening. I finally managed to return to our property on the evening of Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of March.



**Figure 5.17:** Our front gate with the green cattle tag '1194' identifying the property.<sup>123</sup>

What I discovered, as shown in **Figure 5.18** below, caused me to literally scream in horror and howl in despair. Without any contact having been made with me, and without my permission, sometime during the second week of March an excavator was driven through the remains of my home.

The three chimneys were smashed to the ground, not only the tops knocked off them but completely demolished to the hearth. This caused considerable damage to other items that had survived the inferno, many of which were now destroyed. Much of the house area was now covered under a sea of bricks, as shown in **Figure 5.19** below. One of my antique chaffcutters (valued at \$650) which had survived the fire did not survive having a chimney dropped on it, as shown in **Figure 5.20** below; it was smashed into a dozen irreparable pieces.

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<sup>123</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.



**Figure 5.18:** 20/3/09 This is what greeted me when I was finally allowed to return home. This was all that remained of our own home and shop at 16 Murchison St. after further demolition by the authorities. Note the smashed chimney bricks scattered in the right front foreground.<sup>124</sup>



**Figure 5.19:** Our kitchen chimney, smashed down to its base, crushing the artefacts below, leaving many salvagable items broken and covered in a layer of strewn bricks.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

<sup>125</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.



**Figure 5.20:** Our destroyed antique chaffcutter, having had the lounge room chimney smashed down and dropped on top of it. A lucky escape, though, for the adjacent concrete garden seat.<sup>126</sup>

The police DVI Teams caused what I estimated to be in excess of \$3,000 worth of further damage to my property and possessions, which they refused to acknowledge or to be held accountable. My property was not the only one treated in such fashion, as can be seen by the accounts of others noted below. Virtually every building in Marysville was treated similarly, causing people immense grief and further emotional turmoil and financial loss. It is little wonder that so many people had nothing much left to look for when they were finally allowed back into their properties, as it had all been crushed by excavators. It seemed to me that what the fire did not consume the police DVI Teams had finished off.

Further, despite the highly photographed nature of post-fire Marysville, and, unusually in like manner to the removal of people's motor vehicles, I have never seen any photographs of the excavators knocking down people's chimneys or driving through the remains of people's properties. One can only wonder if there was a deliberate blackout or censure of any such photography.

I also found that six of my locked security containers were broken open (along with many other containers) and the contents spilled out on the ground. Many items were

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<sup>126</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

missing and have never been found. No-one would own up to this action and I was never told who was responsible for it. I was only told later by the police that it was done by “the police”. Many containers had their lids left open and so filled up with water when it rained, rusting all of the contents that remained inside. One of the larger containers, (approximately 70cm high by 40cm wide by 50cm deep) was locked and jammed shut from the effects of the fire. I knew that because I had already visited my site prior to the DVI Team’s combing of my property, and I had already examined many items, the security cabinet amongst them. Someone had turned that cabinet upside down, moved it to a different location and smashed the hinges off to get inside, as shown in **Figure 5.21** below. It was empty.



**Figure 5.21:** My looted steel cabinet with the door broken off and all of the contents missing.<sup>127</sup>

When I asked the police why they would have done that to a 70 centimetre cabinet, the officer rather remarkably replied, “They might have been looking for a body inside”. What was inside that safe was my collection of family WWI and WWII medals, other medals, jewellery, coins, precious stones and many other precious items; all were gone – the cabinet was empty. After this discovery it had become dark and I had to go home. First thing on Saturday morning I returned to Marysville and went to the temporary Police Station at the Marysville Emergency Services Complex. I asked for the Officer-in-Charge and told him my place had been looted and I wanted

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<sup>127</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: David Barton.

to report the theft. After some discussion, he said to me “You’re not the bloke next door to the service station are you?” I replied that I was and he said, “I think we’ve got your stuff here. It was recovered by the DVI Team.” – ‘Recovered’ – what did he mean by ‘*recovered*’? – The policeman went to a locked cabinet, and sure enough, there were burnt tin boxes that had been taken out of my cabinet, now sopping wet from having been stored in plastic bags.<sup>128</sup> I was mortified. I could not believe it. I walked back to my car to get some boxes to put the things into and burst into tears. I just felt so violated.<sup>129</sup> Worse still, I just wanted to take my property (the ‘body’) and go, but I was then subjected to two and a half hours of having to identify everything and have it photographed before I was allowed to have it back again. I was repeatedly asked if it was all there. I replied, “How the hell would I know.” I was asked to sign a waiver releasing the police from any liability – I refused. I have since been able to establish that two medals belonging to my (now ex- and late) father-in-law are missing along with a number of other un-named medals, probably at least five or six of them. The police have never provided me with any explanation as to why all of my containers were broken open and the contents removed.

I have learnt from my numerous discussions with others that during the lock-out many of our properties were damaged and our personal property stolen by persons unknown. It was an experience that left us angry, frustrated, bewildered, dismayed and further grief-stricken. Our properties were left naked, unprotected and exposed to the elements,<sup>130</sup> and to onlookers. Other accounts, such as Colin and Lyn’s on pages 117-119, Audrey’s on pages 151-152, and that of Kenny, cited on page 169 below, shows just how angry, disappointed and violated we all felt by these unwarranted intrusions upon our properties. We couldn’t get to our properties, but obviously others could. For another couple, Rob and Carolyn, attempting to look through the rubble of their home was pointless:

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<sup>128</sup> Burnt items, when placed in sealed plastic bags, have a tendency to sweat profusely.

<sup>129</sup> My description of this experience was recounted on ABC News Breakfast television with Luke Waters entitled “Marysville Homes Were Looted” and can be found at: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2009/03/25/2525797.htm>

<sup>130</sup> Note that for the first four weeks after the fire it did not rain, so many items were less damaged and quite salvageable. However, during the last two weeks of the lock-out it rained considerably, causing many items to rust and corrode, surviving paper documents to turn to mush, and promoting an acid-rain effect which further damaged much surviving porcelain. The authorities were apparently unaware of the need for some recovery efforts to be made before it rained to avoid such damage.

We had a split-level two-storey home of solid brick on a sloping block. Many of the brick walls were still standing, but an excavator had been driven through the ruins knocking down all the walls. The fallen bricks and excavator tracks destroyed everything within the house area – it was pointless to even try to find anything, although we did try, and did find one or two small things.

However, the properties of some survivors, such as Claire, had not been interfered with much at all:

Claire: I knew what to expect because I'd met the two forensic police who'd been assigned to my property. I met them just purely by chance ... [*and they said*] ... "We tried very hard not to disturb too much; we just had to check for bodies but we were fairly sure there were no bodies at your place." So having that expectation, it didn't really bother me when we got here.

David: So had your place actually been disturbed much at all, do you think?

Claire: No, not very much.

David: So you hadn't had an excavator driven through the middle of it or anything?

Claire: No, no machinery had been on it. No, there were plenty of footprints to indicate activity, but not machinery.

Post-fire property damage and thefts were not limited to the Marysville area. Redesdale<sup>131</sup> Black Saturday survivor and author Robert Kenny, who lost his home in the fires, describes how he too suffered a loss of his property rights and of how his property was further damaged and items stolen in his absence, writing: "Now my place has been violated by thieves and vandals" (Kenny, 2013: 104). Kenny uses the same terminology as many of the people I interviewed. Thefts were not uncommon, as the following examples show:

When Robyn and Reg were finally able to return to the remains of their Granton property, they were dealt a further blow. "I went looking for the jewellery and the photos I had thrown out," she said. "The photographs had all burned but the aluminium ring (binder) was there and I found it. I could see each ring. But all the jewellery I put out there was gone. "We'd been looted." Some time later, the pair discovered that a hot water cylinder left on

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<sup>131</sup> Redesdale is a small hamlet in central Victoria, south-east of Bendigo, which also experienced the Black Saturday fires.

the property had been taken apart by someone scavenging the copper out of it. “We saw some of the very best of people but also some of the worst,” Robyn said.

(Whinnett, 2014)

Accounts of thefts both during the lock-out, and after were often talked about in the community. On one property, where the owners perished in the fires, relatives came and searched through what remained of their home. Many treasured items were found and placed in a pile. Upon return some days later, the pile of items was gone. Another resident outside Marysville, near Narbethong, found some treasured historic family heirloom metal rubbings that had survived the blaze, and placed them to one side for later restoration. Upon return a few days later, they were gone. It appears that local people and outsiders systematically went through other people’s properties (apparently with impunity) and took whatever they thought of value or interest. Here is another small example from two interviewees:

Lyn: Like you’re criminals [*for wanting to be on your own property*]. Yeah, and later, weeks later, we were taken in [*to Marysville*] because of the situation, not having been able to do anything [*because of the lock-out*]. We were taken in with another couple to see our place but we were not allowed to touch anything, and you thought, ‘I can’t even see what I wanted to see’, which I know was there because we’ve got the photo [*taken on 8/2/09*] and you’re saying don’t touch anything. Stuff we saw that day we never saw again, so, yeah.

David: I read in your account that some stuff disappeared, things were stolen.

Colin: Plants were dug up ... it’s amazing what they knew about the garden and where what was.

Lyn: Yeah – it doesn’t matter.

Apparently, even surviving plants were dug up and stolen. This matters because, as I argued in Chapter Two, possessions – including plants – are very important to many people. They form a part of our memories, our sense of self, our personal identity, and are closely related to our sense of place. Possessions provide an essential part of the secure base from which everyone conducts their daily lives. Then, along comes a disaster and destroys our possessions. After that, we search, and maybe find some cherished surviving artefacts, but make the mistake of going home and leaving the precious discoveries on our property, thinking they’ll be OK, or expecting the

authorities to protect them. Upon later return, there is a sense of shock and disbelief to find those things are gone. Someone has come on to our property and stolen them. Happiness and joy at something recovered is immediately transformed into more shock, denial, loss and grief, thereby adding to the burden already being carried. This sadness combines with feelings of powerlessness and a lack of control resulting in a sense of disempowerment and perhaps for some, growing anxiety and depression.

In our weakened post-disaster state these complex emotions, of which we were often unaware, pulled us backwards and forwards on an emotional rollercoaster of high and low psychological affect. Again, we see the effects of broken attachments, frustrated appraisal and searching behaviour, and associated powerlessness and disempowerment all being magnified.

### **The Grocon Clean-up**

Next on the list of interventions for survivors to manage was the clean-up of the burnt-out town, which was to be overseen by the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (VBRRRA), at that time under the leadership of ex-Victoria Police Commissioner, Ms Christine Nixon (VBRRRA, 2011b: 28).<sup>132</sup> This was to prove yet another challenge to many survivors' appraisal and searching behaviours, and often resulted in premature or unwanted destruction of elements of what remained of their secure base.

With a minimal tender process,<sup>133</sup> the Government of Victoria engaged the Grocon construction company on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, to carry out the extensive clean-up of homes and businesses in the bushfire ravaged areas (VBRRRA, 2011b: 107). Work had already commenced in early March 2009, before residents had been allowed back into Marysville.

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<sup>132</sup> As the Victoria Police Commissioner at the time of the Black Saturday fires, Christine Nixon came under criticism from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, and the media and public at large, for going out to a social dinner with friends on the evening of 7/2/09 at the height of the unfolding bushfire crisis. Ms Nixon was then appointed the initial Chairperson of the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (VBRRRA). To some extent this controversy surrounding her actions during the bushfire emergency affected her credibility as the VBRRRA chief with fire-affected communities.

<sup>133</sup> Ex-VBRRRA chairperson, Christine Nixon, noted that the contract had been let in less than 24 hours; "the fastest government contract I've ever seen" (Nixon, 2017).

The clean-up was declared completed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009, with 3,053 properties cleared. Grocon (n.d.) reported that more than 400,000 tonnes of debris was removed and 600 workers in 150 crews were utilised on the project. Grocon claims to have employed many staff “on short-term contracts and focused very much on community liaison, as dealing with the affected regions took a lot of individual care and attention. Grocon conducted the work at cost, and offered as much employment to the local communities as possible” (Grocon, n.d.: see also Grocon, 2009; Nixon & Hanna, 2011: 193; Nixon & Hubbard, 2010: 14; VBRRA, 2011a: 7; 2011b: 106ff.).

Ms Nixon claimed the clean-up was “more than two months ahead of schedule” and that “the clean up was a record effort, in line with world’s best practice” (Grocon, 2009). In hindsight, many locals felt that perhaps it would have been better if the clean-up had not been “more than two months ahead of schedule”, and more care taken. It would also have been better if more employment opportunities had been made available to local people who desperately needed the work. For many locals, the nightmare continued. Once we were allowed back into Marysville, and despite the later claims by Grocon and Ms Nixon, from the locals perspective things seemed to get worse. My personal experience of the clean-up, along with that of many others, was not positive.

There were many examples where property owners had items or structures they had requested the contractors to leave behind that were nevertheless demolished and removed. In some cases, this caused additional rebuilding costs for the property owner. By way of example, Colleen had a large burnt-out farm shed that a builder had advised was structurally sound and repairable. The Grocon contractors had been instructed to leave the shed in place. However, Colleen, who was living in Melbourne after the fire, was phoned by a friend saying that the contractors were on her property and demolishing the shed. By the time Colleen arrived from Melbourne the shed was gone. Colleen then had to build a new one from scratch. This type of problem was not limited to Marysville, as Ireton, Ahmed and Charlesworth (2014), recount with one family near Christmas Hills:

The demolition crew arrived unannounced. ... before we had a chance to search properly for surviving ‘treasures’. My husband discovered the demolition activity by accident, having driven past our property for a quick look. He threw himself in

front of the bulldozer to stop them and called me to bring the kids so we could have a quick sift through before they continued. To be honest there wasn't much left after the fires. There was even less after the bulldozer had been through.

(Ireton, et al., 2014: 71)

As noted earlier, our property at 16 Murchison St. Marysville, was officially renamed "Site Number 1194", with a green cattle tag nailed to the fence. It was an action that created within me a feeling that our home didn't exist any more and our property was no longer our own. Like that of so many others, our home had become a sterile number, devoid of human occupation or ownership. The clean-up of our property occurred on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2009, the last to be done in Murchison Street.<sup>134</sup>

Based upon the earlier experiences of others, I had been scrupulous in my arrangements with Grocon about when they would be allowed on our property, and that I had to be there at all times. I was advised to be at our property at 7.00am on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. They were not there. After making a number of phone calls, a Grocon crew finally arrived at 9.30am, some 2½ hours late, greatly adding to my stress. The Supervisor, who arrived shortly afterwards, told me that I could watch from a distance, but I was not allowed to set foot on the property, or he would call the police to have me removed. I told him in no uncertain terms to "Fuck-off, or I'll call the police and have *you* removed from *my* property". He left.

The removal of the debris from our land continued for two days as shown in **Figure 5.22** below. On the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup>, after the operators had deemed the clean-up of our property satisfactory and completed, I went home. A week later I returned, only to discover that the Grocon contractors had been back on to the property without telling me and had removed a great deal more earthen material, causing additional property damage. When I queried this I was told the Supervisor was not happy with the extent of the clean-up and had, without contacting me, ordered the crews back on site to remove more material. To this day I wonder why the Supervisor had ordered the additional work when I had already signed-off on the job and the site had been given the all-clear. As the contractors had then removed so much more soil from the property, to well below ground level, I had to fight with Grocon to have the hole,

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<sup>134</sup> I was placed under pressure by some locals and government officials to get my 'clean-up' done as I was told our property was making the rest of the now cleansed main street "look messy".

which had been filling with water, re-filled with dirt and gravel to at least restore the property to ground level. This was eventually done.



**Figure 5.22:** Our home and possessions being loaded into a tip truck (24 loads in total). The excavator is sitting on the \$7,500 concrete slab of our garage, laid only 15 months earlier. Note our lounge room wood heater on the ground at bottom left.<sup>135</sup>

After the clean-up was completed, instead of a town there remained wide, empty, stark patches of red dirt and the new reality of nothingness. The town was gone, carted away in thousands of loads, in hundreds of dump trucks. At least while the debris was still there we could tell where things once were, but afterwards it seemed like everything was gone. The town had virtually disappeared. However, by the spring of 2009, as the grass began to grow, Marysville became an expanse of verdant pasture, one large park. It was a blank canvas, covered in lush grass, ready to start afresh.

The clean-up of Marysville was another example of the lack of consideration for the survivors' needs to process their loss and grief at an acceptable pace. It further shows the progression of hampered attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour through frustration and loss of control brought about by disempowerment by the authorities.

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<sup>135</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has shown how the sudden destruction of Marysville left survivors with a strong and immediate need to process their loss and re-establish their attachments by seeking physical proximity and re-connection with their attachment figures and objects. We have seen how this appraisal and searching behaviour is an inherent human need, and important in the processing of loss and grief. We have seen how survivors respond when those behaviours are blocked and perhaps, as a result, may become more traumatised. These are key observations of this chapter.

Whilst not everyone shared in the same experiences and responses, most of those I interviewed did. It would appear that everyone was affected one way or another. Many whose appraisal and searching behaviour had been frustrated and blocked elected not to (either consciously or sub-consciously) participate in the initial recovery efforts, or to search their properties for salvageable items. Some returning residents noted that as they could not personally deal with the situation the solution for them was simply not to be there.

By expounding my and others' immediate post-fire experiences, this chapter has shown how the interruption to processing of normal loss and grief responses, and the inappropriate management of broken attachments, can disrupt appraisal and searching behaviour. Such disruption further compounds the sense of loss and grief, and exacerbates psychological and emotional strain. Our attachments had been severed, our appraisal and searching prevented, and our processing of loss and grief frustrated. There was a sense we had failed to protect our own injured child.

Evidence gathered in the course of this research strongly indicates that the experiences of survivors in the initial eight-week response period had already begun to negatively affect their long-term recovery, exacerbating their trauma, making grieving delayed and more difficult, and leaving them open to the effects of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven. The initial emergency response failed to take into account people's experiences of attachment behaviour, the importance of their secure base (home), of the human necessity of appraisal and searching behaviour, and of the powerful love they felt for their place (topophilia) and their pets. It would appear that the authorities were not

cognisant of these important relationships and hence gave no thought as to how these deep human experiences ought to be managed. In the months following, as we shall see in the following chapter, things did not improve.

The response of the authorities was disorientating, frustrating, distressing and disempowering. It exacerbated our sense of loss and grief. Our landscape, our community and our secure base had all been destroyed, had died a fiery death, yet we were not allowed to view the body, nor touch it, so were unable to commence the grieving process. And even after we were allowed back in to see the body, it had been further mutilated by persons unknown.

The very first thing we lost in Marysville on Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2009 were many of our basic human rights; rights about respect for individuals and respect for personal property; rights about participating in decisions that affect us and in which we have a direct interest; rights about freedom of access to our property, and about freedom to grieve in a timely and appropriate way. Our personhood was affronted; our loss of basic rights had begun.

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## Chapter Six:

### *The Next Few Years – The Recovery Phase*

*If you are going through hell – keep going!*

(Winston Churchill)

After a few days of staying in Ringwood and buying new clothes we moved to a one-room flat at Coldstream where we stayed for eight weeks. We then moved to a four-bedroom house at Narbethong; it was good to be back closer to Marysville. We stayed there for nine months and both continued to work at Coldstream, travelling back and forth over the Black Spur each day. I took time off work going to the early community meetings and, once Marysville had been re-opened, back to our property to clean up. This was a process that took many weeks, until finally I realised I just couldn't do it any more. Unbeknown to me, by that time I was starting to feel the cumulative effects of the disaster. I was already suffering from what I now know to be Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT), which developed into depression and eventually into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Before the fire, during 2007 and early 2008, I was the inaugural President of the new Marysville and District Chamber of Commerce (M&DCC) where I had an albeit brief role as a community leader. Shortly after the fires and, perhaps on that basis, I was invited to become a foundation member of a new grassroots community organisation, the Marysville and Triangle Development Group<sup>136</sup> and attended the first few meetings. The MTDG<sup>137</sup> group became known locally as 'MaTDoG', (pronounced 'MadDoG') and took on an initial lead role in the recovery of Marysville before being pushed aside<sup>138</sup> by the Government-appointed 'Community Recovery Committee' and the Council's own 'Section 86' Committee. After a short while I realised that with the pressure I was under at work and the competing pressures and stress of my own personal initial clean-up and recovery work, something had to give, so I had to pull back from all the committee work – I just couldn't do it all.

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<sup>136</sup> This was a name that I suggested, as opposed to 'recovery', because I wanted to see the group 'develop' the district after the fire, not just recover.

<sup>137</sup> For more information about the MTDG organisation, see:

<http://www.marysvillecommunity.net/index.php/history/archives/rebuilding/2012-02-22-12-20-49/about-matdg.html>

<sup>138</sup> See Gunter's (2011: 70 & 71) comments on pages 258-260 of Chapter Seven.

However, much to my disappointment and annoyance, I soon found that I was no longer even being asked to attend any community meetings, nor was I being included in consultations that were occurring, and was not allowed to attend the important Phoenix Workshop that was held in June, 2009. It seemed that others were now taking over and I was no longer welcome, perhaps because I had already expressed some strong views about the way things were being managed, and that we, the locals, no longer seemed to be in control of our own recovery. That is what this chapter is about.

In Chapter Four we learned of the experiences of some Marysville residents on Black Saturday. Then in Chapter Five we learned more of their experiences during the initial eight-week response phase. This chapter now builds upon that work to consider broken attachments to the past, the loss of a secure base and of topophilia disrupted. This chapter continues the journey of loss and grief, and, most importantly, points towards the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of some Marysville residents over 'The Next Few Years – The Recovery Phase'.

The time period addressed in this chapter is four years and eight months, from April, 2009 until December, 2013.<sup>139</sup> During that period much of the town's infrastructure was rebuilt and some of the myriad issues arose in the recovery process. There were many challenges in rebuilding the town, far too many to be addressed in this thesis. Consequently, with a view to adhering closely to the research questions, I focus upon issues and events that I understand to have affected, either positively or negatively (or indeed a mixture of both) Marysville bushfire survivors' experiences of attachment, loss, grief and post-disaster recovery. This four-year period saw many residents struggle to regain attachments that had been lost. I believe that many struggled with what I now refer to as Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, a process fraught with highs and lows, frustration and anxiety, often disrupted by setbacks, and for many, resulting in sadness and depression. Within the community, some people wanted the town redeveloped much as it was, whereas others wanted to develop a new town from a clean slate. This became a source of continuing tension.

Having reflected on all the interviews, and as a participant-observer myself in the community both before and after the fire, I have identified key events that took place

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<sup>139</sup> Notwithstanding that I later address matters regarding the construction of the new Vibe Hotel which was officially opened on 21/4/2015.

during this post-disaster recovery period that speak to issues of attachment, loss and grief, and to issues of disempowerment and disenfranchisement.<sup>140</sup> It is worth noting that I saw a transition from the earlier interviews I commenced in October 2011, which contained more definitive raw emotion and feeling, through to the later interviews which concluded in December 2013, that were by then more often moderated, reflective and rationalised.

As seen in previous chapters, some experiences may appear minor to an outsider, yet nevertheless contribute to survivors' cumulative negative experiences of attachment, loss and grief, and the onset of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. Many experiences had a major effect, particularly those revolving around the construction of new public buildings. While some experiences had a positive effect upon individuals and the community, others delivered negative outcomes that were felt more privately than publicly. Yet as this was happening, people were still trying to focus on key goals in rebuilding their own post-fire lives. Survivors were primarily engaged in finding somewhere to live, in rebuilding a home somewhere, finding employment and finances, ensuring that family needs were being met, that their children were at school, and that somehow their lives could be put back together again.

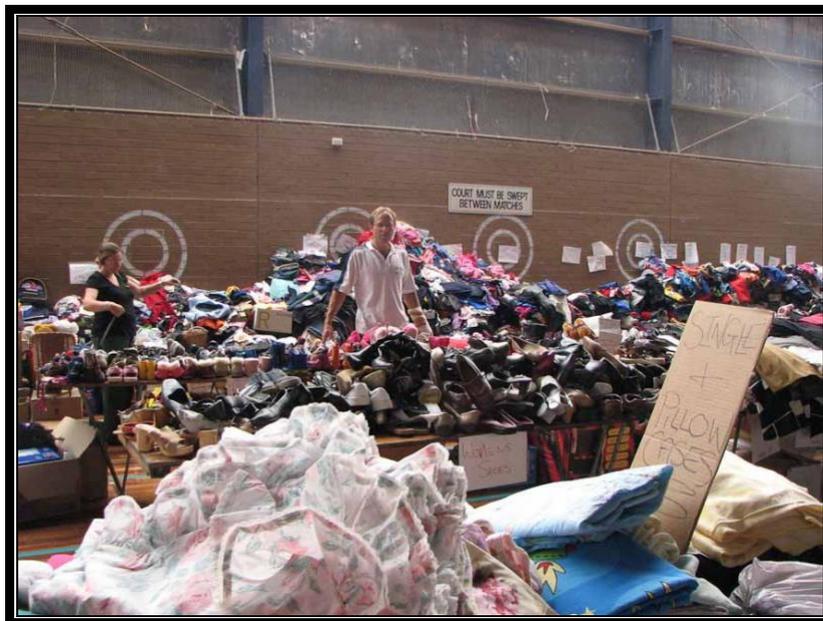
Amidst all these personal challenges the issue of how best to rebuild the town was something many did not have the spare energy in which to participate. Further, it became clear that it was those who had not lost their homes in the fires who were most able to engage in the town rebuilding process, whereas those who had lost everything were too time-poor and emotionally drained to be able to fully or effectively participate. Many of the above issues will be explored further in the thesis, and while there is much that seems to emphasise the negative effect of many experiences upon some in the community, it is worth considering the positive dimensions as well, as these too had their effect upon experiences of attachment, loss, grief and recovery. First amongst them was the role of the Relief Centres established almost immediately in the aftermath of the fires.

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<sup>140</sup> Note there is a subtle difference in meaning between Disempowerment and Disenfranchisement. *Disempowerment* is to “deprive of influence, importance and power” whereas *Disenfranchisement* is to “deny a privilege or right” or “to deny having a representative at an elected body”. In this case of post-fire disaster, both apply. (Brown, 2007: 693 & 702; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/disempower> & <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/disenfranchise?s=t>)

## Experiences of the Relief Centres

I have for a long time been perplexed about my own and others' responses to attending relief centres. It is complicated, yet contributed towards my realisation about the existence of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. For my then wife<sup>141</sup> and me, the first few days seemed as if our brains were playing tricks on us. We couldn't get past the idea that we didn't need any clothes because we still had it in our minds that we already had wardrobes full of them back at home, but we had no hard evidence of that – we had just been told; we hadn't seen it for ourselves. From a loss and grief perspective, it was initially very difficult to psychologically accept and understand that we had lost everything – that we don't actually *have* a home any more, nor do we have a wardrobe, or any clothes (see page 55-56 in Chapter Two). On Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, wearing ill-fitting borrowed clothes, we went shopping for new ones. We came away with nothing, finding it terribly difficult to get it into our heads that we needed to buy anything. It took well over a week to get through this shock and denial phase. In light of the above, we found attending the relief centres initially overwhelming and confronting. (Images of the Healesville Relief Centre are shown in **Figures 6.1** and **6.2** below.)



**Figure 6.1:** Marysville's Dr Lachlan Fraser at the Healesville Relief Centre. Note the mountains of donated goods.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>141</sup> My wife Jennifer left the marriage in January, 2011; we were divorced in January, 2013.

<sup>142</sup> **Source:** <http://marysvillecommunity.net/index.php/your-photos/image/28-lachlan-at-relief-centre-17-feb.html#fwgallerytop>. Note that the overwhelming number of donated goods pictured contributed to what has also been referred to as a 'second disaster', as discussed in Chapter Two.

For me, going to the relief centres was amongst the most moving and emotional experiences of all. Others I have spoken with also found going to the relief centres difficult and profoundly emotional.



**Figure 6.2:** Marysville’s Sue Hill at the Healesville Relief Centre. Again, note the mountains of donated goods.<sup>143</sup>

When I later saw disasters such as the 2011 Queensland floods and the 2013 Tasmanian fires on television, the thing that caused me the most emotion (and tears) was not seeing everything flooded and burnt; it was seeing the people in the relief centres. Why is that? I suspect it reflects two things; first, it reflects what has been lost, and the searching behaviour that people naturally indulge in – searching for something that is the same as, or like what they have lost, and secondly, the overwhelming generosity of those who donated items for survivors, and the amazingly kind, generous and compassionate people who staffed those relief centres. Of their relief centre experiences, Colin and Lyn had this to say. They were,

Colin: ... embarrassed initially and very grateful, in the fullness of time. Some absolutely wonderful people there and some really good hearts – we just had very good experiences from the relief centre, from the people working there. We know the system was abused but the people working there were just amazing.

David: Why do you think you felt embarrassed?

<sup>143</sup> Source: <http://marysvillecommunity.net/index.php/your-photos/image/27-healesville-relief-centre-17-feb.html#fwgallerytop>. I do not know what happened to all of the surplus donated goods that were not distributed to survivors; one can only wonder where they all went.

Lyn: We're used to giving, not receiving.

Colin: Never, ever, I've never been on the dole in my life, never been on benefits, never been out of work, had always considered that – this is going to sound so awful, but I thought that people who shopped in Op Shops<sup>144</sup> must be absolutely desperate. Now I'm a fan of Op Shops, and the pictures that are hanging on the walls here have come from Op Shops. So, yeah, I think it might have been a pride thing.

David: So in a sense has it changed a bit of your outlook on life, then?

Colin: Oh, yes. Yeah.

For Colin and Lyn, their relief centre experiences were very positive, and indeed altered the way they perceived needing and accepting help. When I spoke with Neil and Tracey about their relief centre experiences, they too were very positive, as Neil said:

It was really hard. I remember going to one relief centre and they kept giving us all of this stuff. Have this, have that, and I'd say, "No, we've got this, we've got that" and "we don't need any more stuff" – or Tracey said, "We don't need any more stuff. Give it to somebody who really needs it." I said, "Well, I've got a pair of pants and another one at home, and two shirts." I think we should be able to get a few extra bits and pieces but it was hard putting the hand out. That was the hardest part. Especially being in the Lions Club; we're used to helping people. Being on the other side of it and getting stuff back. But yeah, we did go to a few relief centres and they were great.

Again, Neil and Tracey had a very humbling yet positive experience where they too learnt to receive, and that promoted making new attachments to new possessions, and helped assuage loss and grief. Brent also suffered from the illusion that he already had all he needed because, "I still had all that stuff at home". He continued:

I was embarrassed because I thought – because you still think you have stuff. And this guy walked up to me and said, "These look like they'll fit you." And he gave me a pair of gumboots. I said, "What in the hell do I want gumboots for? It's about 50 degrees outside." He replied, "Ah, you'll use them one day." And of course, I did, when I was building the house because I worked through the winter. And people were – they loved it. They had all these volunteers working there and they were – you could see it – they were delighted. You'd come in and they'd say, "Oh, we've got these T-shirts" – because most of the stuff that started

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<sup>144</sup> Op Shop is Australian slang for an Opportunity Shop, the same as a Goodwill shop in the USA, or a charity or thrift shop, 'the Oxfam', in the UK.

off was donated second-hand stuff but as it went on, there was a lot of places like Target and K-Mart and all that were giving new stock to – and all of a sudden we get something new. I think on the Monday they opened the relief centres. All this stuff I've got on is from the relief centre. Look, I'm happy to wear it. I'm forever grateful. Well, that's the way I felt; I felt overwhelmed. But I'll tell you, I go through stuff and if I don't wear it for 12 months, it's straight to the Op Shops. It's to people who can use it, yeah. I'm not going to hang on to stuff.

Brent experienced the kindness of the relief centre volunteers who just seemed to be so pleased themselves to be able to help out the survivors. He also experienced that new phenomenon of now holding on to possessions lightly, and getting rid of them if they were no longer being used. Gwen and Simon also had a transformative experience:

Gwen: Well, on Monday they got set up in Alexandra very quickly. I don't know how, and I still don't know how, but a whole heap of clothes from nowhere.

Simon: It's just amazing in two days, isn't it?

Gwen: Yeah. A whole heap of clothes came in. They had a hall divided up into men's and children's and ladies' and all in the different sizes, so we needed to choose some clothes. I found that a very hard thing to do. I still find it hard; people say to a woman, "God, it must be a great opportunity to go out and redo all your wardrobe." Well, no, it's been one of the hardest things for me to do, that I've ever had to do. I still find it hard. So that was an amazing thing that Tuesday. Simon went at it like Simon does. He said, "I've found this, and I've found this. This was good fun." I came out with nothing and he came out with heaps. He said, "Come on, we'll go again." I went in with his eyes and...

Simon: New stuff, yeah. I needed to get new stuff. I didn't want to get second-hand stuff.

Gwen: But then we flipped. That was the first one on that day. Because, I don't know, I've never worn second-hand clothes. I've never worn somebody else's clothes.

Simon: Well, you've never worn clothes that you haven't gone and bought.

Gwen: I've never worn clothes that haven't been new. I just didn't want to put myself into a category of person that I wasn't. It wasn't embarrassing so much; it was degrading. It was degrading.

Simon: The first day there was slightly – it was slightly...

Gwen: Degrading. It wasn't humbling.

Simon: I suppose it was slightly degrading.

Gwen: It wasn't humbling. It wasn't really a nice thing when you come down to it.

- Simon: Yeah. The first day I think that was easier. As I said, we didn't have anything. I needed to have some shorts and you got some trainers and stuff. So we needed to get that. So that was easier.
- Gwen: I should say though, I'm still sitting – I'm sitting now in second-hand clothes. I have not bought these clothes.
- Simon: You've changed. You've changed.
- Gwen: I have – out of the four items of clothing that I'm wearing I've only bought one.
- Simon: We went down to the Yarra Glen relief centre – that's where I felt I didn't want to be walking in there. I didn't want to be seen going in here, and there was a lot of groceries and...
- David: As a victim or...
- Gwen: As a victim.
- Simon: As a victim, yes.
- Gwen: Yeah.
- Simon: Yeah, I didn't want to be looked at like that. So I didn't need to, and by that time I'd started working. Gwen had started working too by then I think, so we actually had money coming. There were SPC fruit pots<sup>145</sup> there and toothbrushes and that sort of thing. I thought, no, I'm not – I could just go through. We could not have to spend money on groceries and just pick all this up and save money all the time. But I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to feel like that as a victim. I'm not kind of sure why we were actually in there – to go and have a look at things.
- Gwen: Well, I started out one way and then I went the other way. We flipped, and I went the other way. I thought people have donated this and there are things we need that we might as well see if it's there.
- Simon: Yeah.
- Gwen: Right from the word go we bought our own furniture ...
- Simon: ... a major element of why we didn't use the relief centres as much.
- Gwen: Yeah. We said, "We'll buy things that we'll put into our new home." So unlike some people, we didn't have anything second-hand in our home. It was only the little bits and pieces. We didn't go to the big relief centre down in Clayton and end up with pink saucepans and things like everybody else did. We just didn't do that.
- Simon: But through a Salvation Army contact – we found out – I can't remember how we found out about it; if you go down there they've allocated \$1,000 per person, or something like that. You think, "Wow, okay." So we went down there. That was humbling and you think...

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<sup>145</sup> 'SPC fruit pots' are small containers of fruit (usually peaches, apricots or pears) manufactured by the Shepparton Preserving Company (now SPC Ardmona, a branch of Coca Cola Amatil).

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPC\\_Ardmona](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPC_Ardmona)

Gwen: Yeah.

Simon: ... because it was some time on and they said, “We’ve got this money and we need to give it to you.” It was the little things that you don’t insure for because all the little things around the house that actually add up to what you’ve lost, so it’s not really included in your insurance and that you’d go into the shops and think, “No, I’m not going to buy that because it’s just more money, and more money, and more money.”

Gwen: Yeah, so it was that and occasionally somebody would say, “They’ve got something in at the relief centre,” and I’d go and have a look. But, again, it was just, “Well, I’m going for something specific.” We needed grotty clothes for cleaning up and for doing the garden so we went to the relief centre.

Gwen: We needed to be as ...

Simon: Normal.

Gwen: ... to get back to what was normal.

Simon: Yeah. So I wanted to stop going into relief centres.

Gwen: Yeah. So Simon stopped. He wouldn’t go in. Even with grant money and things like that Simon would say, “No, we’ve moved on. Leave it.” I said, “We’re entitled to it.” But we knew we’d move on.

Simon and Gwen’s rich thick-description is very telling of their transformative relief centre experiences, and of how they changed positions, not only within themselves, but in relation to each other, during their post-fire recovery. It reveals an interesting mix of emotions and change of attitudes. Perhaps the outside observer might not realise it, but the experience of having to deal with relief centres was one of the most confronting and humbling post-fire experiences for many survivors. Whether it was having to wear second-hand clothes for the first time, accepting assistance from strangers, having been used to being a giver, not a receiver, seeing the excesses of some who just took far more from the relief centres than they could ever use (and just gave it away to family and friends unaffected by the fires, or even later sold donated goods on eBay), there was all manner of human emotions and experiences, both good and bad.

Going to the relief centres brought the loss of attachment to possessions into sharper focus. Whether it was the pain of the grief over lost precious items of clothing, a pair of favourite boots, a mother’s pearl necklace, or whatever – in the immediacy of post-disaster life, the relief centres made those losses palpable.

## **Experiences of the Temporary Village**

Immediately after the fire it became apparent that many people needed somewhere to live. The newly formed Marysville and Triangle Development Group (MaTDG, of which I was a founding member) immediately set to work to establish a place for people to live. Support was offered from West Australian mining entrepreneur Andrew ‘Twiggy’ Forest, and transport magnate Lindsay Fox, both of whom made substantial financial contributions towards the construction of what was to become the success story known as the ‘Marysville Temporary Village’ (as shown in **Figures 6.3** and **6.4** below). The village was officially opened on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009, eventually housing over 40 displaced families.

Donovan, (2013c), notes that the villages (one at Marysville, one at Kinglake) were rapidly constructed and whilst some were concerned that “the community would become a ‘ghetto’ of damaged people” (p 219) these fears did not eventuate. The Marysville Village had an appointed manager, held regular communal meals and meetings, and, as Donovan notes, “with people making great efforts to adapt to their new circumstances, respect their new neighbours and retain their connection to their community” (p 220). Nevertheless, Donovan (2013c) also reports that some residents unused to living in such confined spaces found that other people’s pets and noise “began to cause conflict in the relatively constrained village” (p 221). As a result, some people moved out, yet among others, issues “were discussed and resolved” (p 221).

A VBRRR (2011b) report noted of the Temporary Village that:

The Authority project-managed the planning and construction on site and worked with DHS<sup>146</sup> to install temporary housing. The first occupants moved into the village on 17 May 2009. The facilities and housing on the site were fully established by early July 2009. ... The Marysville village reached its peak in occupancy on 6 November 2009 with 50 DHS units, four of the three and four bedroom houses and 16 single person’s quarters occupied. Occupancy numbers started to decline in April 2010. The one room units were removed from the site

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<sup>146</sup> DHS: The then Victorian State Government Department of Human Services (now DHHS, the Department of Health and Human Services).

in July and September 2010 and returned to FMG.<sup>147</sup> In June 2011, 35 households remained in the village. With the lease on the site extended to 2012, options for the future of the site were still being explored.

(VBRRA, 2011b: 144)



**Figure 6.3:** The layout of the Marysville Temporary Village with accommodation shown in blue (single persons at lower left, large families at lower right, couples at centre, with proposed additional units in light blue at upper right), the dining room and kitchens as large yellow and other offices as small yellow. More units were eventually built in the space at middle left.<sup>148</sup>

By late 2012 the three-year leases had expired and the last residents were moving out as they rented, purchased or built a more permanent home. The Temporary Village was sold to the Outdoor Education Group and became Camp Marysville, an outdoor education and recreation facility primarily for school groups. Of the many families and individuals who lived there, most had a very positive experience, although some could not cope with living in such close quarters to others and did not stay very long. Neil had this to say of his experience of the village:

Neil: It wasn't ideal but it was very handy. It was great. ... it was comfortable and it had everything you wanted. I mean we would have been – a lot of people would have been in trouble without it.

<sup>147</sup> FMG: Fortescue Metals Group – Andrew Forrest's West Australian-based mining company.

<sup>148</sup> Source: <http://www.splintersociety.com/assets/bulkUpload/site-plan.jpg>

David: Was there a good sense of community there?

Neil: Yes and no. That depends what area you were in. There was a lot of trouble with younger kids there ... I mean there was a lot of troublemakers, but you could say who they were before the fires. Nah, there was nothing major, it was all pretty good.



**Figure 6.4:** The small two-bedroom units (# 18, 19 & 20) in the Marysville Temporary Village showing the close quarters that residents' shared with each other.<sup>149</sup>

Gwen thought that some people had made decisions about whether or not to stay in Marysville at all based upon their experiences in the Temporary Village. Those experiences may have confirmed their decision to stay and rebuild, or helped them to decide to leave the district permanently. Of her and partner Simon's experience, Gwen said:

I think the village, although it kept the community together and was a huge positive, the one-size-fits-all attitude, well, that added to people's stress. It certainly added to our stress. It probably created a little bit of depression with me but not with Simon. But it added to our stress. We didn't know how much until we got out. We got out because there was a flare-up with one of the other families in there, and the best thing for us was to move out.

Nevertheless, Gwen and Simon eventually decided to stay in Marysville and rebuild. Matt, who was a government official in Marysville at the time, thought the Temporary Village was,

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<sup>149</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

... a great idea, a terrific idea. It brought community together into one place. It did have its small issues about who your neighbour was and whether they had loud music or whether you liked that music because they were very close to each other ... It's no different to being in a caravan park, for example. But from a community perspective it was an ideal opportunity for them to have community dinners; they had opportunity to eat with each other or with their families as well. ... So it was also a central place for people to come, and if they wanted to meet, generally they'd meet at the village, because there were – the population base was greater in the village than it was in the township because there were more people there.

The biggest adjustment, the biggest factor was a bloke I had who came to me and said, "Three months ago I was sitting on my Chesterfield lounge in front of my open fire with five acres between me and the next door neighbour. Now I'm looking out my window and I can smell what they're having for breakfast." That was very, very difficult for some families, and they became aggressive at different times because of that frustration, and they were in that village not by choice.

There was anger and frustration and also despair, and people who were very, very capable of implementing anything they previously needed to do on their own property, they'd just go out and do it. So an example of that would be that the door lock didn't lock on one of the units. So they had to ask for permission to get that door lock fixed through DHS and then wait the period of time that DHS would take to come out and fix that lock.

You try and understand that it's very, very difficult to get that change from being very autonomous and in control and having your own decision-making processes, that if your lock didn't work on your door at home, you ring the locksmith and get it fixed. In this particular case they were disempowered, if you like, from making their own decisions and that was very, very difficult for many people, and it created anger.

In addition, Matt noted there was some us-and-them conflict and survivor-guilt between the Village residents and those few people still living in Marysville. Further, because of strict privacy laws people not living in the Village or in Marysville missed out on donated goods or important meetings or events, as their contact details could not be passed on to other parties. As Matt said:

There should be at least a moratorium on all privacy laws until people are in a better space, and that could be decided by whatever the governing body is of the disaster, but it needs to be addressed. People missed out on information purely because we knew where they were but

we couldn't let the other department know where that person was because of the privacy law that didn't allow us to give them that information. It was just ridiculous.

The net effect of this was intense frustration, as I too experienced, having missed out on donated goods or important meetings because I only found out about them after the event. My contact details could not be passed on so if a friend in the village did not tell me, I never knew until it was too late. This was very disempowering.

The few inevitable personality and relational issues as a result of so many arguably traumatised people living in such close quarters meant that life in the Temporary Village may not have been an idyllic Shangri-La, but nor was it ever expected to be. The general view is that the Marysville Temporary Village was very successful, providing an opportunity for many Marysville residents to be supported by each other and by government, and to consolidate their post-fire position, thereafter having a solid base from which to launch themselves out into their post-fire lives.<sup>150</sup>

### **Work opportunities for locals in the Clean-up**

After the fire, many people were out of work, their places of employment having been destroyed. The Grocon clean-up presented an opportunity for many to find work, but it never happened to any meaningful degree. Indeed, Nixon and Hanna (2011) state that the clean-up program “presented a valuable opportunity for local employment”, and that contractors were “required to employ local people wherever possible”, although those people also had to gain the “necessary qualifications to meet operational and safety standards” (p 194). What Nixon and Hanna fail to mention is that when Christine Nixon was personally questioned by one of my interviewees (André) about what area she viewed as ‘local’ for employment on the clean-up project, she defined it as being “somewhere between Croydon and Mansfield”, (being 65 and 109 kilometres from Marysville respectively) putting most of the eastern suburbs of Melbourne into that category.

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<sup>150</sup> See also footnote 225 on page 254 regarding the outworking of ‘Soliphilia’.

Further, gaining the necessary qualifications, a ‘Red Card’<sup>151</sup> at minimum, was such an onerous and time-consuming task that by the time genuinely local people had completed the requisite training programs and gained the qualifications, most of the contracts and positions had been filled and the clean-up was virtually finished anyway. Very few truly local (Marysville and Triangle area) people were employed in the clean-up, and, indeed, many were deliberately shut out by the sub-contractors in favour of their own employees. As some locals told me, this left a bitter taste in their mouths, as they were desperately seeking some work. They found it a deeply disempowering and frustrating experience, contributing to ongoing anxiety and depression. Some left the district as a result.

### **The Royal Commission and Leave-to-Appear**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, the Victorian Government established a comprehensive Royal Commission into the bushfires.<sup>152</sup> It was an enormous undertaking, costing \$37.5 million,<sup>153</sup> engaging over 150 staff and operating for 17 months (VBRCd: xiv, 51, 91). By late March, the Royal Commission was calling for applications through widely-distributed media advertisements from people wanting to appear before the commission to give evidence. The process of gaining standing before the Commission was to be achieved through an application for “Leave To Appear”. The below excerpt of a *Herald Sun* advertisement provides some details:

If you, or someone you know, wants to appear before the Royal Commission into the Victorian Bushfires in the coming months, you must lodge your application for ‘leave-to-appear’ in writing by 4pm on 9 April 2009. ... The Victorian Bar, through Bushfire Legal Help, is offering free assistance to people affected by the bushfires to: Complete and file formal ‘leave to appear’ applications ... .

(*Herald Sun*, 31/3/2009)

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<sup>151</sup> A Red Card is the basic Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) induction training for the construction industry. It is a prerequisite for all workers going on to construction sites. It is now known as a White Card. **Source:** <http://www.ohsrep.org.au/faqs/ohs-reps-@-work-faqs-for-workers-/red-cards>

<sup>152</sup> The Terms of Reference are available at: [http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/getdoc/ad6c101e-c8a2-4bbd-8fbd-a8f31813f7bd/Royal\\_Commission\\_2009\\_Terms\\_of\\_Reference](http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/getdoc/ad6c101e-c8a2-4bbd-8fbd-a8f31813f7bd/Royal_Commission_2009_Terms_of_Reference)

<sup>153</sup> Of which legal firms received almost \$12 million (VBRC, 2010d: 51).

I took up the offer made in the *Herald Sun* advertisement and had a meeting at the Marysville Temporary Village Hub on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 with a very helpful lawyer from Bushfire Legal Help who had driven all the way out from the Melbourne CBD to meet with me. Completing the application took quite some time and effort. The lawyer suggested to me that I encourage others to join my application so that our Triangle area stories could be told. To that end, I teamed up with another interested party, Eamon O’Flaherty, from Narbethong and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 we placed an advertisement in the local *Triangle News* (see **Figure 6.5** below).

***Making our voices heard at the Royal Commission***

You may not be aware, but the recent Royal Commission community consultations were preliminary, informal, and don’t have formal legal standing. The main formal and legal process is about to begin. Eamon O’Flaherty (Narbethong) and David Barton (Marysville) have formally applied for ‘leave to appear’ before the Royal Commission, and your additional input is needed to assist them.

If you are concerned about issues related to the lead-up to Black Saturday, the day itself, or what followed afterwards, then we need to hear from you, as it is vitally important that our community views are formally heard and legally recognised by the Royal Commission.

Issues we need to speak up about include:

- **Before the fire:** personal and community preparation; fuel loads; communications.
- **During the fire:** early warning; communications; emergency response; evacuation; refuges; roadside vegetation.
- **After the fire:** denial of access; communication with residents; removal of vehicles; road closures; further damage to private property; response of authorities.

If you have an opinion about these or similar issues, then please participate in the formal Royal Commission process with us. Even if you don’t wish to appear before the Royal Commission, we need to know your views anyway so we can form a comprehensive consensus position from the Marysville, Narbethong, Granton, Buxton and Taggerty communities. Free legal advice will be provided if required.

**Please contact ASAP:**

Eamon O’Flaherty (Narbethong)	Mob: 1234 567 890
David Barton (Marysville)	Mob: 1234 567 890

**Figure 6.5:** The advertisement Eamon O’Flaherty and I placed in the local *Triangle News* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2009. The response was negligible – two phone calls.<sup>154</sup>

We had a very limited response, a mere two phone calls. I think many people were still just too shell-shocked and bewildered, trying to manage their own affairs, to be bothered. In addition, most Marysville residents were no longer living in the area. My

<sup>154</sup> **Source:** Document held in author’s collection.

application and those of many others were duly submitted; 132 applications were received by the Royal Commission (VBRC, 2010d: 10) seeking standing to appear. After all that work, and much to our shock and dismay, it was publicly announced that not one individual application was granted; only thirty organisations were granted Leave-To-Appear.<sup>155</sup> No explanation for the refusal of individuals to appear was ever given and this created some media controversy (VBRC, 2010d: 11). However, for us the entire exercise had been a total waste of time, an exercise in futility, and we felt misled and betrayed. Thousands of dollars had been spent on advertising calling for applications from individuals, briefing and sending lawyers to Marysville (and no doubt to other fire-affected areas as well) yet no appearances were granted. We wondered what the point was, and this compounded our sense of disenfranchisement and disempowerment.

We never received any explanation about our rejected application; we were instead invited to make written comment to the Commission, which received almost 1,700 submissions (VBRC, 2010d: 5). Interestingly, only 20.2% of submissions came from the hardest hit area, the Murrindindi Shire (VBRC, 2010d: 7), which may indicate that people were too emotionally and physically exhausted, and just too busy attempting to rebuild their lives, to undertake the task.

Of the 83 people I spoke with regarding this project, only four of them, myself included, lodged a submission with the Royal Commission. This is a very small number. When I asked people why they had not lodged a submission, the typical replies were, 'It's too hard' ... 'a waste of time' (as indeed it proved to be), 'I don't have the energy' or 'we don't see the point', with add-on comments such as 'nothing's going to change anyway, so why bother?' Apparently there was no point to our submissions to the Royal Commission either. They seemingly disappeared into the ether without response. It appears that no action or publicity was given to the valuable material that was contained in the hundreds of submissions received by the Commission. For some this was a big issue. We felt ignored and again disempowered. What we had been through seemed not to matter. Nobody wanted to hear our story. This was another of many disappointments and frustrations, leaving us feeling

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<sup>155</sup> A full list of parties (organisations) granted Leave-To-Appear is found at Appendix D of the VBRC Final Report, Vol. III, p. 74-75 (VBRC, 2010d).

abandoned. Perhaps government should not call for submissions from the public if it has no intention of utilising them.

## **Community Committees, Consultations and Reports**

Almost immediately after the fires some people began to activate themselves and become organised. Apart from my initial involvement in the establishment of the self-sown Marysville and Triangle Development Group (MaTDG), when the more official calls for membership of community committees became known my then-wife and I both formally registered our interest by writing to the Council as people who were keen to be members of the Recovery Committees. However, we received no reply. We were left wondering how those decisions were made as to who was to be on what committee. This appeared not to be an open, transparent, democratic or fair process.

### **Community Committees**

There were several organisations and committees with responsibility for the recovery process. Apart from the overarching State Government VBRRRA organisation, the Murrindindi Shire Council established a 'Section 86 Committee'<sup>156</sup> and VBRRRA established a local Marysville Community Recovery Committee.<sup>157</sup> The local committees were meant to be representative and consultative, but that is not necessarily what happened, as is discussed more fully in Chapter Seven (see also: FRU, 2011a, 2011b; Gunter, 2011; Leadbeater, 2012). Suffice it to say, many interviewees noted that the various committees held little interest for them, and had little perceived relevance as they struggled with their individual recovery.

### **Community Consultations – the Phoenix Workshop**

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<sup>156</sup> A 'Section 86 Committee' is established under Section 86 of the Local Government Act (Victoria). It is a 'special committee ... to which the Council delegates a duty, function or power.' When exercising a delegated power, duty or function, a special committee effectively 'is the Council'. All special committees must comply with the rules for special committees in the *Local Government Act 1989*. This includes delegation limits, meeting arrangements and conflicts of interest.

**Source:** [http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0013/225202/2013-Governance-Practice-Note-9-Special-Committees-of-Council.doc](http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0013/225202/2013-Governance-Practice-Note-9-Special-Committees-of-Council.doc)

<sup>157</sup> It is interesting to note that most members of the new Marysville and Triangle Development Group (MaTDG) did not lose their homes in the fire. The same applied to the new Marysville Community Recovery Committee (MCRC); most did not lose their homes either. It would seem that many of those who had lost their homes did not have the time or emotional energy to participate in the wider recovery process, and that certainly became true for me as well.

The first major consultation was the Phoenix Workshop held on the weekend of the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 2009. It was designed to map out the future re-development of Marysville. One would have thought the contributions of as many interested locals as possible would be essential. However, along with many others, I was told there was no room for me, despite having been a main street business owner and the immediate past-president of the Marysville and District Chamber of Commerce (the then current President having died in the fires). I was specifically excluded from attending the Phoenix Workshop; nevertheless, some others just showed up on the day and insisted upon participating.

O'Neill (2014)<sup>158</sup> recounts this workshop in some detail. She notes that some locals who attended observed that the 120-strong workshop apparently consisted of more outsiders than local people, being representatives from “businesses, state and local governments, non-government service providers and potential corporate donors” (p 128). O'Neill further notes that the “VBRR staff also lacked the knowledge of the community’s structure, leadership and dynamics” (p 127-28) so one would have thought that the inclusion of many informed and experienced locals would have been essential, but that was not to be. O'Neill concludes that “resentment amongst those who felt they had not been included would complicate recovery efforts for some time” (p 128). (Note the corollary with Mannakkara, Wilkinson and Potangaroa on page 198, and Leadbeater’s quotations on pages 260-261 of Chapter Seven). The outcome of the Phoenix Workshop was the draft ‘Marysville and Triangle Urban Design Framework’ (MTUDF). Opportunity for feedback was given, with, as O'Neill notes, locals providing “some important suggestions on how to adapt it” (p 128). However, O'Neill then notes that the draft framework was “revised with minor adjustments” (p 128) – the feedback did not alter the framework very much at all,<sup>159</sup> and it was adopted by the Murrindindi Shire Council.

Many of the projects were common sense essentials (a supermarket, a fuel station, a police station, a school, a health clinic, tourist accommodation, a conference centre) as they simply replaced what was lost. Other wish-list projects have failed to materialise (such as the development of an ‘iconic public space’ – the proposed

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<sup>158</sup> Kerry O'Neill was a VBRR staff member during the early recovery and rebuilding phase and published her reflections in 2014.

<sup>159</sup> As we were later to discover, community feedback rarely, if ever, altered what had already been decided by external officials and authorities.

*Marysville Heart* project, and the construction of a Triangle walking and cycling trail from Marysville to Narbethong and Buxton). The Phoenix Workshop was the first major consultation regarding the reconstruction of Marysville. However, for many it contributed to the developing sense of exclusion, of disenfranchisement, of disempowerment, and of the community not really being heard at all. Unfortunately, this was a process that was to continue. As Philip said to me during one interview, “The community is consulted and then outsiders make the decisions about what they think is best for us” whilst VBRRA went on to say:

The workshop approach gave the community a central role in determining the shape of the rebuilding plan rather than simply an opportunity to comment on options. It promoted a shared vision of what needed to be done to make Marysville well designed, economically viable and sustainable. The ideas developed at the workshop and subsequent feedback sessions with community organisations, local businesses and community members directly informed the development of an Urban Design Framework.

(VBRRA, 2011b: 172)

This is not really what happened at all. As one Marysville business owner, Mike, said to me: “Of the 17 property owners in the main street of the [*business*] area they were looking at, only three were invited to the workshop.” That concurs with my experience as well. It is clearly difficult to re-establish a business economy in Marysville if key people are excluded from the consultation.

Two main reports were eventually compiled: the Boston Consulting Group’s ‘Economic Recovery Strategy’ (BCGERS) and the Roberts-Day and Contour Consultants ‘Marysville and Triangle Urban Development Framework’ (MTUDF). These documents, completed by outsiders, (and critiqued in Barton, 2009) did not reflect the community’s real economic sustainability needs or the longer-term realities of the disaster. Further, despite what some officials might maintain, the community was consistently given architectural drawings and plans of the new buildings (eg: the Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) building, the community centre and the police station, all discussed later in this chapter) that were presented as a *fait accompli*, with very little room for variation, and in the case of the proposed RAC building and police station, no room at all.

It is tiring to read sanitised academic versions of how supposedly wonderful Marysville's recovery has been – this is not the case. The reality is, some eight years later, and with all the outsider consultants and helpers now long gone, Marysville remains a shadow of its former bustling economic self, and shows little sign of improvement. Almost 50% of all new business start-ups since the fires have closed, of the 32 new or repaired shops, 44% are empty, whereas pre-fire occupancy of the then 31 shops was 100%, and many of Marysville's main street businesses are currently up for sale (see **Appendix I** for details). Whilst several of the numerous vacant properties in the main business precinct have been sold, nothing has yet been built on them, and two have recently been placed on the market again. It is not my intention to be unduly negative; I am highlighting the reality. The economic recovery of Marysville has not been a success, and, with the exception of the corporate Vibe Hotel, the only economic successes of Marysville today come from the committed pre-fire business owners who have sacrificed much to rebuild their own businesses with precious little, if any, assistance from government. As one prominent Marysville businessman I interviewed said: "To be honest, it's only been us private business people who've put up our own money to rebuild [*our businesses*] and make this work. The consultants have contributed nothing for us – nothing at all." As Ingham and Redshaw (2017) have noted, the idea of "recovery as an endpoint" (p 60) needs to be challenged (see also MSC, 2017: 59-60). In 2017, over 8½ years after the fires, the recovery of Marysville is far from complete.

## **Reports**

In October, 2009, I submitted my own 24-page response to the MTUDF and BCGERS reports in which I sought to address the way "both documents fail to consider the practical realities and constraints that will need to be addressed to enable the successful reconstruction and economic recovery of both the old (pre-fire) and the new (post-fire) Marysville" (Barton, 2009: 2). My detailed document met with no response whatsoever and I remained excluded from any committee or consultation involvement. Clearly, I was not wanted.

Hayashi (2011) says that common features of post-disaster planning include, *inter alia*, that "recovery plans intend not only to restore the affected area to its original condition, but also make the area safer, stronger, smarter, and better than before the

disaster” and that “they treat the participation of diverse stakeholders as indispensable for the success of the recovery” (p 41-42). However, it seemed that the Boston Consulting Group’s plan was simply for more of the same as before the fire, without understanding that the town was already in decline, so more of the same would do nothing to reverse that trend because those same things are not working. This lack of understanding was at the time very frustrating for the community and remains so to this day.

Much more can be said about the processes involved in the compilation of the MTUDF and BCGERS reports, but in summary, it was simply an overwhelming force of outsiders coming in and inflicting their ideas upon a community that had very little opportunity or ability at that time to really work through and voice its needs and desires for the future. Indeed, much of what was envisaged in the Urban Design Framework document was largely fanciful and has simply failed to eventuate.

During these consultation periods I contend that the community was largely disenfranchised and disempowered in favour of powerful outsiders and select cooperative insiders. Recovery theory sounds so plausible, but in reality the experience of residents may be quite different. There is a dichotomy between what some academics describe as success and the experience of those on the ground. Mannakkara, et al., (2014) state that “important stakeholders – such as the local community” (p 271) should be recognised, and that to be effective, practitioners “must consult with community members to understand local needs, wants and culture” (p 271). They note that “involvement in important decision-making empowers people and encourages them to support the recovery process” (p 272). Futher, Mannakkara, et al., (2014) state that in Marysville “community recovery committees [CRCs] ... enabled the interaction between residents and other stakeholders” (p 272). This is not strictly speaking correct. The CRCs enabled interaction between some community members, to the exclusion of many others, and as Mannakkara, et al., later note, some community meetings were “invitation only” (p 281) and, as stated by one of their interviewees, “I don’t think they got the mix right ... there were some fairly significant people who didn’t get invitations and that created a division within the community” (p 281).

One wonders who it was controlling the invitation process. So, when speaking of community disempowerment that often occurs with the arrival of massed (and probably well-meaning) external assistance, Donovan (2013a) notes that:

They can contribute to a sense of disempowerment as local communities no longer feel in control of their own destiny, their wisdom and insights are unvalued and its custodians disregarded.

(Donovan, 2013a: 3)

This is exactly my own experience and that of many others I have interviewed in the Marysville (and business) community.

### **Darwin Street Realignment**

Opportunities to redesign, repair and seal some of the town's roads were lost. The only road re-alignment that took place was where Darwin Street meets Murchison Street, (now termed 'the Hume Highway' by some locals) and it was viewed by most locals as quite unnecessary. It has now altered the balance of the town's shopping district and perhaps contributed to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and solastalgia (see Chapter Seven, p 247ff.). The Murrindindi Council purchased the large parcel of land where the old Foodworks Supermarket and Newsagency once stood and put the road through it.<sup>160</sup> The authorities apparently did not understand (or care) how realigning the location where Darwin Street joined with Murchison Street would totally alter the dynamics of what had been the main business area of Marysville for almost 150 years. As Audrey said to me: "This is so unnecessary – it's ruined this end of town and it's ruined my business. What were they thinking?" While the road realignment may not appear to be of much importance, it certainly altered the nature of the town and of how people felt about it.

### **The Supermarket Car Park**

By early 2009 the community was strongly pushing for the old Motor Museum in Darwin Street, a relatively new very solid brick building that had survived the fires, to

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<sup>160</sup> This location was also a very historic site, being where the original famous 'Barton Stores' (no relation to the author) were situated, but that didn't seem to matter. To my knowledge, no pre-construction archaeological survey works were undertaken.

be converted into a supermarket and shopping area. Eventually, government agreed to purchase the building and undertake its conversion to shops. As a part of the conversion, a car-parking area was needed out the front. Once construction commenced it was clear that the car park would be a small constricted space with very limited access both in and out of it. I spoke with the contractors who were building the car park, and they pointed me in the direction of the project manager. I made an appointment to see the him and outlined my concerns about the shortcomings of the proposed car park and provided options for an improved design. As I recall, the project manager said to me, “Bad luck mate; it’s too late for any changes. It’s going ahead as it is.”

The supermarket complex finally opened on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 2009, and to this day there remains only one narrow entry and exit point to the car park so that only one car can enter or exit at any one time, leading to congestion in Darwin Street. There is no space for vehicles with trailers or for larger four-wheel-drives or trucks. It did not have to be like this. With some extra thought and common sense applied, there was an opportunity to build something effective that works efficiently, but this was not done. So now the community must forever put up with the result; a poorly designed car park that is a daily problem for those coming and going from the supermarket. Annette, who was very annoyed about the design, said to me, “Why can’t they get this stuff right? Why can’t they just listen to us? Why do they always seem to ignore us and just do it their own way?” Again, it might not seem like much, and it might not seem so important, but it’s just another thing that happened that did not have to. In a community, it’s often the little things that count, and this is one of them, again leading to a feeling of a loss of control and powerlessness against external forces that come in and dictate the terms, contrary to both common sense and the wishes of the people.

## **Construction of Government Buildings**

Notwithstanding all the smaller annoyances as above, the construction of government buildings and the Vibe Hotel were the most controversial recovery issues in post-fire Marysville. There were four different buildings to be reconstructed: the Visitor Information Centre, the Primary School and Kindergarten, the Health and Community Centre, and the Police Station. Different people were involved with each project, and each one had very different outcomes.

Without enlisting broad community support, Marysville was about to be thrust into the modern era of architecture with what many locals describe as the “Fed-Square”<sup>161</sup> style. The new Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) building (on the site of the old Visitor Information Centre), the Kindergarten, now amalgamated with the Primary School, the Community Centre (now amalgamated with the Community Health Centre) and, in my opinion, the ostentatiously ugly and impractical Police Station are perfect examples of the populist Fed Square style. Indeed, such buildings date rapidly and require a great deal of maintenance and upkeep. From an architectural perspective it would appear that for many of these buildings *form* has very erroneously taken precedence over *function*, which in turn has implications for *finance*.<sup>162</sup>

Marysville’s pre-fire buildings were characterised by subtle and muted old world building styles. They blended in well with the expansive floral surroundings of the town. However, the new buildings are huge, dominant and stark, and given the lack of any flora of significant height, look imposingly barren against their background. Further, it is puzzling why single-storey buildings such as the RAC and the Police Station have two-storey dimensions. It is perplexing why the rear wall of the Police Station is 6 metres (19’ 8”) tall. For a small town such as Marysville it is difficult to understand why such imposing dimensions were necessary or even desirable.

Many locals, including myself, ask why much of the town could not have been largely put back the way it was. (This would have greatly assisted with re-establishing topophilia and preventing solastalgia.) Perhaps it would have been preferable for many of these buildings to be rebuilt in a style similar to the original, perhaps a little bigger, and with different, more modern and technologically appropriate interiors. This was not to be; design was outsourced to principally Melbourne-based architects.<sup>163</sup> The community had little input and we got what we were given.

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<sup>161</sup> The ‘Fed-Square’ style is a reference to Melbourne city’s architecturally styled ultra-modern Federation Square city-centre at the corner of Swanston and Flinders Streets.

<sup>162</sup> It has long been understood that the *function* of a building should in large measure dictate its *form*. In recent times this truism seems to have become reversed, whereby architectural form seems to take precedence; function is then squeezed into it, and *financial* considerations often inflated to satisfy the extravagant form. This seems to be what has occurred with many Marysville public buildings. (See also: <http://inar323.cankaya.edu.tr/uploads/files/frank%20lloyd%20wright.pdf>)

<sup>163</sup> Note that the Triangle area had numerous local architects, designers and planners who were not called upon to contribute.

Further, many opportunities for alternative energy sources, designs, and use of different building materials and technologies were lost in the haste to construct the new buildings. Of this rush, Claire said, in summary: “There were just so many lost opportunities for things that could have been done so much better – yes, I guess that says it all, just lost opportunities.” In the haste to get the electricity reconnected throughout the town (despite their being few buildings to connect to), opportunities to place some of the power lines underground were lost. Sensible and needed road repairs were ignored, yet unnecessary road works (as seen above) were undertaken instead. Government buildings became large and ostentatious as architects seemed to be competing for industry design prizes irrespective of and completely oblivious to the desires, needs and requests of the remaining local residents. Friendships between some in the town were sorely tested over these issues; nevertheless, Government still pushed ahead with its mantra – “We Will Rebuild” (whether you like it or not).

### **Construction of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) and Visitor Information Centre (VIC)**

The construction of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC), which later then became the Visitor Information Centre (VIC), was fraught with controversy from the outset. As I understand it, the RAC building was a structure that had been pre-designed before the 2009 fires, sold cheaply (perhaps donated) to the Government, with duplicates to be built in both Marysville and Kinglake. Complaints by many locals of a lack of due process, real consultation and transparency led to a petition being organised and circulated by local resident Suzanne Prien, as shown in **Figure 6.6** below. The petition was ignored. Instead, the then Victorian Premier, John Brumby, responded to the community’s concerns by promising, “If in two years’ time you still don’t like it we’ll pull it down and build you what you want.”<sup>164</sup>

Minutes from the MaTDG Community Meeting held on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 2009 state, “The VBRRR ‘rebuilding building’ will be going on to the Visitor Information Centre site. It will be removed in 2 years if not wanted, or could be kept as a Visitor

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<sup>164</sup> **Source:** Author’s notes. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 2010, the then Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, the Murrindindi Mayor and other officials met with Marysville residents. Mr Brumby promised that if at the end of the Temporary Use Permit the residents of Marysville wanted the RAC building remodelled into something more acceptable, the Government would ensure that funds would be made available to do so. This was a hollow promise.

Information Centre (VIC) and community meeting rooms.” As the two years came around, with dissatisfaction about the building still strong, Ms Prien again raised a petition to have the building removed and replaced with something more appropriate and useful. By that time in late 2011, Premier Brumby was gone and a new Government elected. The second petition, as shown in **Figure 6.7** below, was also ignored. Neither petition ever gained any traction. With the dismissal of the second petition some Marysville residents were accused of being ungrateful for what they had been given. It appears that the building will remain, and will be a permanent reminder of one of many buildings foisted upon the community.

**PETITION – Marysville Rebuilding Advisory Centre**  
**To the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority and the Federal and State Governments of Australia.**

- 1) We, the petitioners of the Marysville and Triangle District, and other persons with an interest or concern regarding the redevelopment of Marysville, express our concern and dissatisfaction with the construction of the proposed Rebuilding Advisory Centre in Murchison Street, Marysville.
- 2) We are concerned about the lack of due process, consultation and transparency regarding the design and construction of the building, and concerned that whilst it is termed a ‘temporary’ building, will become a permanent town fixture.
- 3) We therefore request that construction of the building be halted until such time as a full community consultation can be held regarding the nature and design of an appropriate permanent building to be constructed on this site which is of central importance to the future of Marysville.

**Figure 6.6:** The first petition in November, 2009, regarding the construction of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre. This petition was ignored.<sup>165</sup>

**PETITION to Remodel the Marysville ‘Rebuilding Advisory Centre’**  
**To the Victorian State Government (Legislative Assembly), the Murrindindi Shire Council and the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority.**

On 1 May 2010 the then Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, the Murrindindi Mayor and other officials met with Marysville residents. Mr Brumby promised that at the end of the temporary use permit if the residents of Marysville wanted the RAC building remodelled into something more acceptable, the Government would ensure that funds would be made available to do so.

The temporary use permit for the RAC building expires in March 2011. Arrangements have been made with Murrindindi Shire to use the RAC building as the Tourist Information Centre once it is no longer required for rebuilding services.

The RAC building was designed with total disregard to the character of Marysville (being identical to the corresponding building in Kinglake). Whilst Marysville residents are aware that Marysville could not be rebuilt as it was pre-fire, the town could have had a central building that reflects and respects the aspects of Marysville that drew so many visitors over decades.

<sup>165</sup> **Source:** Document held in author’s collection.

This petition is to attain the consensus of people who have an interest in or reside in Marysville to ensure that Mr Brumby's promise to remodel the RAC building will be honoured by the new Victorian State Government, the Murrindindi Shire Council and VBRRA.

Therefore, this petition draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly and the Murrindindi Shire Council to consult with Marysville residents as to how the RAC building should be remodelled, and to make the funds available for the remodelling works, and to use local tradespeople for such works.

**Figure 6.7:** The second petition in February, 2011, regarding the 'temporary' nature of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre. This petition was also ignored.<sup>166</sup>

The RAC building was officially opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 2010. Hook (2011) writes, "This is not highbrow architecture by any means, but it is thoughtful, economical and 'fit for purpose' in this difficult context." Hook's assessment is quite incorrect. The building is impractical (not thoughtful), energy hungry (not economical), and certainly not fit for purpose. Indeed, to many the building is gaudy and inappropriate. While some people in town like the new building style (mostly the new residents), others (mostly the pre-fire residents) share my view. It is curious that some authors wax lyrical about the supposed success of these projects when in fact that is clearly not the experience of many in the community.

In writing about the Marysville RAC building, Donovan (2013c) says that, "A recurring theme I heard was concern about the siting, scale and design with its 'harsh straight lines, and hard corners'" (p 224). Donovan further notes that some in the community thought that "the design seemed to reflect a city architect's view of what was appropriate in a small rural community" and that,

... the new building was a prominent and unwelcome intrusion in the town that further eroded the last vestiges of the town's pre-fire character, disregarding the familiar pattern of built and natural landmarks.

(Donovan, 2013c: 224)

Donovan's work, (2013a, b, & c) well captures the Marysville community's views about the reconstruction of many town buildings, and confirms both my own experiences and those of people I have interviewed. The old Marysville Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and the new RAC/VIC building are juxtaposed in **Figures 6.8** and **6.9** below.

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<sup>166</sup> **Source:** Document held in author's collection.



**Figure 6.8:** Pre-2009 Marysville Visitor Information Centre (VIC), Murchison Street. <sup>167</sup>



**Figure 6.9:** The new 2010 Marysville Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) building, which then became the Visitor Information Centre (VIC). The photo is taken from the same position as the photo above in Figure 6.8 <sup>168</sup>

The expansive and imposing, yet highly impractical design and construction of the building is also shown in **Figures 6.10** and **6.11** below.

<sup>167</sup> Source: <http://www.travelvictoria.com.au/marysville/photos/>

<sup>168</sup> Source: <http://www.architectureanddesign.com.au/news/industry-news/aami-park-stadium-sweeps-victorian-architecture-aw> Image: Peter Bennetts.



**Figure 6.10:** The spartan and impractical interior of the new 2010 Marysville Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) building. This interior is soon to be gutted and replaced, at a cost of almost \$650,000, with a far more practical and sustainable layout.<sup>169</sup>



**Figure 6.11:** Another view from a different angle of the new 2010 Marysville Rebuilding Advisory Centre (RAC) building. The Kinglake RAC building is identical, except that the name KINGLAKE replaces the name MARYSVILLE on the head board.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Source: <https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/14289-kinglake-ranges-marysville-rebuilding-advisory-centre>

<sup>170</sup> Source: <https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/14289-kinglake-ranges-marysville-rebuilding-advisory-centre>

Remarkably, at the time of writing, government has finally acknowledged that the interior of the award-winning RAC/VIC building is unsuitable for the community's needs, is inefficient and expensive to operate, lacks environmental sustainability credentials and is in need of a full renovation. Consequently, almost \$650,000 has been allocated towards the internal stripping and refurbishment of the building. Perhaps now with the new funds for refurbishment the promise of "removing the building and replacing it" will at least be partially fulfilled. One can only wonder how a building that won an *Australian Institute of Architects Regional Architecture Award* in 2011 now, six years later, needs to be internally stripped and rebuilt because it is so impractical, inefficient and unsustainable. If only the community had been listened to in the first place.

### **Construction of the Marysville Primary School and Kindergarten**

Alongside the construction of the RAC building came the rebuilding of the Marysville Primary School and Kindergarten. In contrast to the debacle of the RAC building, the construction of the primary school (and the now co-located kindergarten<sup>171</sup>) appeared to proceed seamlessly with the consultation of the kindergarten and school community. The new facility was opened on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, 2010, four months earlier than the RAC building. I was not involved in this process and have not heard any complaints or criticisms regarding it. Most seem very pleased with the outcome. Comments about the rebuilding of the Marysville Primary School and Kindergarten did not feature in any of my interviews.

### **Construction of the Marysville Community and Health Centre and Basketball Stadium**

In contrast to the Primary School and Kindergarten experience, yet in following the RAC building episode, the design and construction of the Community and Health Centre was fraught with angst. Opened by the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce AD CVO, amidst much fanfare on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 at a cost of \$9.2 million,<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The pre-fire Kindergarten was located in Murchison Street adjacent to the car park next to the old Visitor Information Centre. It was agreed to re-locate the Kindergarten to the Primary School site and convert the old Kindergarten site into the new 'Kin Playspace, Children's Park and Reflective Gardens' at a cost of over \$1 million.

<sup>172</sup> Source: <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/fire-recovery-unit/resources/fru-news-room/marysville-community-centre-opens>

the building appears to be another reflection of contemporary post-modern architecture where form seems to be everything, but function, attractiveness, utility, practicality and efficiency counts for nothing (see **Figures 6.12 to 6.14** below). For example, absent are practical verandas that provide any real protection from Marysville's wet and windy winters, the existing verandas being too high to serve any useful function.

Even though there was a Committee with community representatives on it, the project designers did not seem to be very interested in modifying their designs in accordance with community feedback. Some of the problems with the new building, as identified by the community, are: it is in the wrong position for the football field; it took valuable land from the school yard; it faces the wrong way; front access areas are open to the weather; it mainly comprises a modern basketball stadium, yet Marysville has never had a basketball team, and still doesn't have one; the downstairs showers are separate from the change rooms; the entrance to the meeting rooms are too far away from the street (Falls Rd.), and the kitchens are far too small; the combined medical centre has not been well designed and provides little privacy. The building is under-utilised and cannot pay for itself, with operational expenses being very high. Overall, it lacks practicality and effectiveness.



**Figure 6.12:** The new Marysville Community and Health Centre, looking south-east.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Source: <http://www.marysvillecommunitycentre.com.au/>



**Figure 6.13:** The front entrance to the new Marysville Community and Health Centre, looking north-west.<sup>174</sup>

Further, because of the incorrect placement of the community centre in relation to the goal posts (see **Figure 6.14** below) the local football club wants to raise money to re-shape the oval and literally move the goal posts to a more appropriate location. The cost has been estimated in-excess of \$1 million, so is unlikely to happen. This problem could have been so easily avoided through proper early consultation.



**Figure 6.14:** The new Marysville Community and Health Centre, looking South West.<sup>175</sup>

However, in the final analysis, the Marysville community nevertheless has a community and medical centre, so just has to make the best of what's there. The Community Centre controversy receives further analysis in Chapter Seven.

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<sup>174</sup> Source: [http://www.spowers.com.au/web/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/MarysvilleComCen\\_717x381\\_01.jpg](http://www.spowers.com.au/web/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/MarysvilleComCen_717x381_01.jpg)

<sup>175</sup> Source: <http://www.marysvillecommunitycentre.com.au/>

## **Construction of the Marysville Police Station**

When in 2011 it came time for consultations in relation to the construction of the new Police Station, many people were exhausted and at their lowest ebb. Controversy was immediate. The authorities and some community members wanted to move the police station to a different location, thereby making more room for the proposed 'Marysville Heart'<sup>176</sup> project in the centre of Marysville. However, there were strong opinions, especially from the longer-term residents, that the Police Station should remain where it always was. And so it came to pass that Police Station was rebuilt on its original site. The 'Marysville Heart' proposal was scuttled in what was seen to be a win for the old-school.

At the time of the controversy, many locals, including myself, were just too exasperated, drained and tired to get involved, so withdrew from the process. In addition, the Police Department has quite strict requirements regarding police station design and let the contract to a firm of architects. Opened in 2012 and again a prize-winning design (being the winner of the 2013 Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) Awards: Regional Prize, Victoria) the new Marysville Police Station is once more a triumph of post-modern Fed Square architecture, and not in keeping with the old-Marysville that so many wanted returned. Marysville residents have observed that the overstated and jutting veranda provides no protection from the elements during Marysville's harsh summers and wet winters, apparently serving no useful purpose at all. Perhaps this is again where form trumps function. Further, the narrow gravel and stone path leading to the front entrance has been indentified as a tripping hazard for Marysville's elderly.

It is also difficult to understand why the rear of the Police Station is a 6-metre (19' 8") tall, ugly, grey Besser-block wall.<sup>177</sup> Internally, this single-storey building has a huge amount of just empty air space that needs to be heated in winter. Views of the new police station are shown at **Figures 6.15**, to **6.17** below.

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<sup>176</sup> The 'Marysville Heart' project was a proposal to transform the very centre of Marysville into one large park by acquiring the police station site and adjacent private land. The project was compromised by the police station being re-built on its original site, which is in the centre of the proposed project area. Instead, the new Kin Playspace, Children's Park, Reflective Garden and New Life Sculpture have all been constructed to the east of the Visitor Information Centre.

(See also: <http://www.urbaninitiatives.com.au/projects/parks-and-gardens/marysville-heart/>)

<sup>177</sup> Note that in 2016 I approached the Police to inquire as to the possibility of a large mural being painted on the wall. I received no response.



**Figure 6.15:** The new Marysville police station dominates the landscape. The veranda provides little shelter from the sun or rain, and the path has a rough stone and gravel surface that is difficult to negotiate.<sup>178</sup>



**Figure 6.16:** A side-view of the front of the new police station looking east.<sup>179</sup>

Once more, this project may have been good for the architects, but they do not have to live with the building, or the continuing daily effect that it has upon the townspeople where it serves as a constant reminder of our disempowerment.

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<sup>178</sup> Source: <http://www.australiandesignreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Kerstin-Thompson-Marysville-Police-Station.jpg>

<sup>179</sup> Source: [http://media2.architecturemedia.net/site\\_media/media/cache/06/bb/06bb2e8509e1f2a9fd48826696ed1df5.jpg](http://media2.architecturemedia.net/site_media/media/cache/06/bb/06bb2e8509e1f2a9fd48826696ed1df5.jpg)



**Figure 6.17:** A side-view of the rear 6 metre wall of the new police station, looking east.<sup>180</sup>

In writing about the new Marysville buildings, Donovan, (2013a) notes that, “the contrast to the remembered townscape was deeply upsetting for many and emphasised the loss and an apparent insensitivity by the authorities” (p 5). Once more, this concurs with my own experience and that of those I interviewed.

### **Construction of the Marysville Men’s Shed**

The location and construction of the Marysville Mens’ Shed was another controversial issue. Government insisted that it be built on Crown Land, and the piece of land chosen was on a steeply sloping block in a residential area, as shown in **Figures 6.18** and **6.19** below. Being on such a block the building had to be split level, necessitating a considerably higher construction cost. Also, being in a residential area, the shed was not allowed to look like a shed, and was required to look more like a residential premises, again at extra cost. Despite protests from committee members, the shed (sometimes referred to as the ‘Taj Mahal’ by many locals) was built in accordance with Government approval and conditional grants. The total cost exceeded \$750,000 (perhaps the most expensive Men’s Shed in Australia), leaving little money to actually equip it with the necessary tools.

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<sup>180</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: David Barton.



**Figure 6.18:** The newly completed Marysville Men's Shed, constructed on government land, as required.<sup>181</sup>

Once again, it is good that the town has such an asset, but it could have been so much better. Internally, the Men's Shed is a cramped space which allows no room for expansion, and this limits its scope for both social and project use and growth in membership. There is no meeting area to speak of, the kitchen area is far too small, there is no vehicle access to the main work area, and the ground-level area under the building is not very accessible or usable.



**Figure 6.19:** Rear view of the newly completed Marysville Men's Shed clearly showing the difficulty of access to the shed itself.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

<sup>182</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

Indeed, as Max noted, “The Men’s Shed should have been allowed to purchase a flat block of land in an appropriate area to build a more appropriate and usable shed at half the cost.” Max added that this would have “left a good deal of funds in the bank for future projects and needs,” which is of course what the Men’s Shed Committee wanted to do in the first place – but they were not allowed.

Once again, the community is left with an apparently nice building that is nowhere near as functional as a more appropriate building would have been in a more appropriate location. With community wishes over-ridden and the desires of the Mens’ Shed Committee over-ruled, Government had its way and the community now has an attractive building that is not fit for purpose.

### **Construction of the Vibe Hotel and the Demolition of the Indoor Swimming Pool**

In December, 2010, Victorian Premier John Brumby’s Labor Party lost the State election to the conservative Liberal-National Coalition led by Ted Baillieu. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011, the new Minister for Bushfire Response, the Hon. Peter Ryan, announced that the Government would contribute \$19 million towards the construction of a new \$28 million hotel, motel and conference centre complex for Marysville (Hansard, 2011: 4864).

In preparation for the new project, a local community consultation was held in Marysville on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2012, by Regional Development Victoria (RDV). Interest was high with about 90 people attending, which represented most of the Marysville population at that time. We were advised from the outset at the meeting that the project “... is a private sector development, so the developer will have the final say”, and that “... what’s decided at the meeting is not binding on the developer”, which left many asking what the point was of having a community consultation at all. Nevertheless, the meeting came up with 19 points for consideration, which included retaining the existing indoor heated pool for community use, retaining the important remnant trees on the property, and a low-rise development that would fit in with the understated nature of the Marysville of old. We were assured at the meeting that our community input would “go into the Tender Documents to the developer.” The point was made that the community did not want to see a repeat of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre, Community Centre or Police Station

eyesores – no more ugly buildings, and contemporary should not mean hideous. To this end, local long-term resident Nancy Leslie read out a statement to the meeting, as quoted in **Figure 6.20** below:

Letter to <a href="mailto:rdv@rdv.gov.au/fire-recovery-unit">rdv@rdv.gov.au/fire-recovery-unit</a>	12.2.12
Regional Development Victoria	Murrindindi.vic.gov.au
To Whom It May Concern,	
<p>For today's meeting, 12 February, 2012, you have asked for the community's views, aspirations and expectations. May I express my views? Previous public consultation with the community regarding building planning, in regard to external architecture, appear to have been useless going by appearances (of what we ended up with.) Of the four new public buildings, none are quaint or pretty. ie: the RAC/VIC building, the Marysville Primary School, the Community/Sports/Medical Centre and now the Marysville Police Station. They do not have the charm of Marysville, pre-2009. I wonder if this meeting of 12 February will make a difference. Are we wasting our time being here? It would be good to have at least one big building to reflect the community's views, aspirations and expectations.</p>	
<p>I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful for these internally effective buildings because I am grateful. I only have to think of my childhood in Marysville. We didn't have a basketball, let alone a stadium.</p>	
<p>My question is: can we have the advantages of modern interior architecture and an old charm external architecture in one building? I want to see at least a hint of old Marysville. It would please a lot of people to see the Hotel/Conference Centre with a romantic appearance. How lovely that would be. El Kanah Christian Guesthouse<sup>183</sup> on Buxton Road, Marysville, has that lovely appeal. So we know that it can be done. In Melbourne when buildings need replacing, care is taken to ensure the buildings reflect the past. Imagine the outcry if you put corrugated steel walls in Melbourne.</p>	
<p>We know that for now we can't have green screens of leaves, as in times past, because for fire hazard we can't cover the big mistake of corrugated walls with trees. We can't hide our mistakes, so we have to live with it. Why?</p>	
<p>In Europe, care is taken to replace the buildings the way they used to be. Obviously Europe understands the value of tourism. Tourism, I tell you, earns such a good pollution-free dollar. Tourism will make jobs for our industry-depleted Marysville. The Tourist Dollar is the cream on the pudding. We need quaint but effective architecture to charm the visitors, not corrugated any-old shed. I thought we were going to have a village with an alpine flavour, but no. Nobody asked for corrugated steel but that's what we have.</p>	
<p>Please consider my request!</p>	
<p>Yours faithfully, Nancy V Leslie Resident.</p>	

**Figure 6.20:** An open letter from Mrs Nancy Leslie to the RDV community consultation meeting held in Marysville on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2012.<sup>184</sup>

Mrs Leslie's statement certainly expressed the majority view of the meeting as was seen by the generous round of applause from those present. Unfortunately, Mrs Leslie's appeal fell upon deaf ears. In October 2012 the Government announced the

<sup>183</sup> El Kanah was the first and remains the only major private development rebuilt in Marysville since the fires, although the recently re-opened Kerami Manor would now come a close second.

<sup>184</sup> **Source:** Mrs Nancy Leslie. Document held in author's collection and used by permission. Mr & Mrs Leslie were long-term Marysville district residents. However, they left the area in 2015.

successful tenderer, the Toga Group, and architecture firm Metier3. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2013, the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, turned the first sod and construction began.<sup>185</sup> Almost immediately, the community was dismayed as the construction company began to clear the entire property of all existing trees, felling many grand old trees that had survived the fire. The block became a blank canvas of dirt as shown in **Figure 6.21** below.

At the same time, a dispute arose about the future of the indoor heated pool which had survived the fires. It had been used as a greatly-valued post-fire community facility and asset for some years. News began to circulate that the pool would not be retained, but demolished in the process of constructing the new Vibe Hotel to make way for a car park, as shown in **Figure 6.22** below. The pool had been closed once the construction company took over the site. As rumours that the pool was to be demolished were confirmed there seemed to be a community paralysis in Marysville to be able to do anything about it. Given their earlier experiences with community buildings many Marysville residents reported that they were just too exhausted for another fight.



**Figure 6.21:** The completely razed Vibe Hotel building site, with all of the vegetation removed. 19/6/13.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> **Source:** <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/fire-recovery-unit/resources/fru-news-room/fru-update-edition-21>

<sup>186</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

Indeed, even though many people in Marysville felt very strongly that the pool should be retained, it appeared that many of the protestors and protest spokespersons came from outside Marysville. Curiously, opinions about the pool were mixed, with the more business-inclined people agreeing that the pool should be demolished, and the more community and family-oriented people wanting to see the pool retained and incorporated into the new Vibe Hotel and Conference Centre.

By June, 2012, the community was being told that the indoor pool was “not viable” (Gannaway, 2012a) but perhaps not desirable would be a better explanation. If the pool had been incorporated into the design of the new hotel then of course it would have been viable. Community feeling seemed divided on the future of the pool, depending upon who people had talked to, and lethargy set in. Rumours abounded about the pool leaking, about cracks in the building, about it being structurally unsound (hard to believe for a 10-year old building), but locals could not know for sure. This was yet another crisis in a long list of contentious issues since the fires, and many were now just too tired.



**Figure 6.22:** An aerial photograph showing the Vibe Hotel site, the proposed location of the hotel building and the hotel car park, the existing indoor heated pool that survived the fires, and some important large remnant trees.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>187</sup> **Source:** Google Earth and author’s collection.

Nevertheless, an advertisement appeared in the Marysville *Triangle News* on 30/11/12 reading in part:

The Marysville Indoor Pool is the only heated pool in the Murrindindi Shire. It has been an extremely valuable resource to our broader community, attracting people from Alexandra and Eildon. The Indoor Pool was initially constructed with a government contribution of \$100,000; it exists on a site that was purchased by the government after the fire; and is part of a development that the government is largely funding. The pool has been an invaluable resource not only for our children's water education, but also for the elderly, for physiotherapy, for health and well being and for outdoor education water skills training. Please write as soon as possible and express your concern that such a valuable resource is to be demolished and what a great loss this will be for our community. Please direct your letters to ...”<sup>188</sup>

However, what was feared sadly came to pass. “A campaign to retain the pool for community use was cut short when the pool was demolished, angering those residents who had hoped to save it” (Gannaway, 2012b). The site was completely cleared of all vegetation and the pool was hastily demolished to avoid further controversy or discussion, reminiscent of the 1979 midnight demolition of Brisbane's Bellevue Hotel by the then Bjelke-Petersen Government (McKechnie, 2010). The demolition of the pool and the new car park on the site of the pool are shown juxtaposed in **Figures 6.23** and **6.24** below.

An important element apparently not considered is that the building survived the Black Saturday fires and as such was one of the few remaining original buildings left in town, so had intrinsic physical and emotional value to locals. As such, there should have been much earlier open discussion with the community about the future of the pool and its incorporation, or not, into the proposed new hotel. Perhaps with different planning the pool could have, and should have, been incorporated into the design of the new hotel creating a satisfactory community outcome. For it to now be gone represents another loss to the community, not only of the physical asset itself, but of the emotional and psychological connection to the pre-fire town. The attempt to save the pool was all too little, too late; it was a matter that should have been pre-empted by government, in real consultation with the community.

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<sup>188</sup> **Source:** Marysville *Triangle News* on 30/11/12.



**Figure 6.23:** The rapid demolition of the Marysville indoor pool – 1/6/2013.<sup>189</sup>



**Figure 6.24:** The same location – 19/2/2015, some 20 months later. Clearly there is no reason why the pool could not have been retained and incorporated as a community facility as a part of the Vibe Hotel complex. Note too, all the missing trees.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

<sup>190</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

The retention and operation of the indoor heated pool should have been planned for and accommodated years earlier in the formative stages of the new hotel and conference centre proposal. Whilst the construction of the new hotel was most welcome and a needed business boost for the town, the loss of the indoor pool and one of the few remaining buildings that survived the Black Saturday fires is a loss to the local community that should not have occurred in the manner that it did. If the pool had to go, its removal should have been clearly explained and negotiated with the community in a cooperative way. Healthy disaster recovery needs to be about the empowerment of affected communities through information and inclusion rather than their disempowerment because of a lack of information and exclusion from the process.

Donovan (2013c) notes that in the reconstruction period, authorities have a responsibility to operate in ways that will “manage expectations, be transparent, be accessible, be respectful, think laterally, empower people, understand how people and place have changed, safeguard against appropriation, look beyond output to outcome, identify common ground, [and] think about legacy’ (pp 242-254). It would appear that the Vibe Hotel and indoor pool experience transgressed every one of Donovan’s described responsibilities.

Further, the Vibe Hotel plan is quite impractical. It took no account of the land contours which were instead bulldozed flat. The old entrances to Keppels Hotel and the Cumberland<sup>191</sup> could have easily been retained, especially as a reminder for the locals, but, no – they too had to be bulldozed. Because of the slope of the ground, the car parking could easily have been incorporated underneath the complex. Instead, people are now compelled to park outside and walk in the heat and the rain to their rooms. Indeed, there is not even an internal entrance to the dining facilities. Hotel guests must walk outside to enter the restaurant and the café.<sup>192</sup> Regarding the charcoal cladding of the structure, this too was apparently nominated by government. According to one of the company directors of the project, the external cladding was

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<sup>191</sup> I note that the Keppels Hotel and Cumberland Resort sites held historical significance for the town; yet, once again, as far as I am aware, no pre-construction archaeological survey works were carried out prior to construction. Even though many historically significant objects were uncovered, most were destroyed – more lost opportunities.

<sup>192</sup> I have recently been advised that the Vibe Hotel is soon to undertake some major construction works to rectify many of the bad building design elements in an attempt to make it more functional.

originally going to be a Japanese-style burnt-timber charcoal effect (known as Shou Sugi Ban<sup>193</sup>). However, community protest at this insensitivity led to a change, but only to a timber board in charcoal colour, and, as Ritchie (2016) reported: “The colour of the building was also chosen by government” (p 3). Having endured the fires and the burnt blackness that endured for years afterwards, the community is now confronted with a major building in the main street that is coloured charcoal.

This is just another reminder of what has been foisted upon the community and left many in a position of stoic resignation. Apparently, we were not supposed to complain, (‘not to be so negative’), accept what we were given, and be grateful. As Max said to me not so long ago, “We’re not the beneficiaries of these projects; we’re the victims of them.” It is difficult to understand why the locals seemed to be omitted from the process altogether. The outcomes of the Vibe Hotel project illustrate the point – the public consultations were a waste of our time. It is little wonder the local population became so irritated. “Despite all the consultations, we’ve had no real choice in what’s happened”, said Annette. There was supposed to be “ongoing consultation with the successful bidder’s architects and the community, but that didn’t happen,” said Claire, and as Max observed: “They tick all the [consultation] boxes on their forms, and then afterwards go ahead and do what they like.” It is not surprising that many have queried the purpose of having the consultation meetings at all, as they apparently meant nothing.

The Vibe Hotel (as shown in **Figures 6.25 to 6.27** below) was officially opened on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 2015. After only fifteen months of operation, an almost complete turnover of staff, and now into its fourth manager, the Vibe Hotel was in 2016 on the market for sale. Further, the poor overall design of the hotel has resulted in main street car parking problems where Vibe Hotel visitors opt to park their cars in the main street rather than in the hotel car park at the rear of the property, which is quite some distance from the hotel entry, and made worse in the rain. The flow-on effect of this problem has been that the Council has now implemented parking restrictions for the whole of the main street (Murchison St.) that did not exist and were not necessary before the fire or the hotel. This too has raised the ire of many residents and main street business owners.

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<sup>193</sup> See: <http://www.shousugiban.co.uk/>



**Figure 6.25:** The main entrance of the Vibe Hotel, Marysville, showing the charcoal-coloured wall cladding.<sup>194</sup>



**Figure 6.26:** The Conference Centre entrance, Vibe Hotel, Marysville.<sup>195</sup>

The local community is very pleased to have the Vibe Hotel in Marysville. However, it could have been planned and constructed so much more carefully and successfully. The old trees could have been retained, the indoor heated pool incorporated into the design, and the layout much better planned. It was not to be, so the community now simply has to learn to live with what has been built.

<sup>194</sup> Source: <http://www.hotelmanagement.com.au/2015/04/22/vibe-debuts-victorias-marysville/>

<sup>195</sup> Source: <https://www.tfehotels.com/brands/vibe-hotels/vibe-hotel-marysville>



**Figure 6.27:** An aerial view of the rear of the Vibe Hotel, Marysville.<sup>196</sup>

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed a range of events that Marysville residents experienced after the fire during the period April, 2009, through to December, 2013. For many residents, these experiences were challenging and were a constant reminder of their broken attachments, of what they had lost in the fires, and the grief they experienced as a result.

The chapter speaks of broken attachments to the past, the loss of a secure base and of topophilia disrupted. It speaks of the effects of loss and grief, and, as with earlier chapters, most especially it points towards the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of survivors in a disaster-affected community. Max summarised this feeling when he said: “The place feels like it’s been burgled and they left us with all the crap. They took all the good stuff.” Gordon (2009a) speaks of ‘Recovery Liabilities’ that are deleterious to healthy post-disaster recovery. They include: a lack of control over restoration, rebuilding and replacement; cognitive disruption and emotional overload; not being listened to; being preached to by alleged experts; lack of cooperation from recovery agencies and uncertainty about the future. In the rebuilding of Marysville the community has experienced all these things. To combat these Recovery Liabilities, Gordon says, “People need to be empowered, given

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<sup>196</sup> Source: <http://www.ourdeal.com.au/travel/domestic/melbourne/deal/vibe-hotel-marysville-getaway-for-two>

control, helped to make decisions and supported to speak” (2009a). This did not happen. Only as all the ‘helpers’ departed have the residents gradually regained control of their community.

Much of my background as an experienced community development worker led to certain expectations I had regarding how the recovery process would work, or at least, should work. I was repeatedly disappointed and often dismayed when I saw the community and individuals being run-roughshod over in relation to plans for reconstruction and the future. Despite the architectural awards and glowing publications, the fact remains that Marysville now has ugly and inappropriate (government) buildings, shops built by private owners at their own expense without consistency of style or theme and without financial assistance, great gaps in the business district where many shops are empty and businesses and buildings have not returned, tourism and local population growth still at low levels, with many businesses still struggling to make a good living.

Many of the mechanisms used in the process of rebuilding had the effect of disempowering and disenfranchising many in the community, who, in their post-fire condition, were at their lowest ebb in their ability to sensibly participate and contribute to the process. This in effect left the door open to others, mostly outsiders, to come in and make decisions on their behalf. Ideally, recovery in Marysville should have (and could have) been hallmarked by independence, inclusion, self-determination and empowerment alongside facilitation, advice and assistance from outside authorities, and a well-supported realistic long-term strategy (see Toomey, 2011, on page 230 in the next chapter). Perhaps too, recognition and consideration of topophilic bonds and attachment relationships, and their connection to the five Ps of People, Possessions, Pets, Place (home), and Participation (in community, way of life, and environment) as discussed in Chapter Two would also have made a substantial difference to what has occurred.

These issues of recovery and rebuilding have dragged on for many years, sapping survivors of emotional strength. Most have now withdrawn from the process. The recovery and rebuilding of Marysville raises issues of resilience, the very real need for post-disaster understanding of what is occurring within people emotionally and

psychologically, and of the need for adequate continuing mental health services and counselling. Not catering for these needs may result in prolonged sadness, Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, depression, suicidal ideation, solastalgia, and on-going and late-onset PTSD. These are far from desirable post-disaster outcomes, yet have all been found in the Marysville and Triangle communities.

By early 2010 I too was suffering badly. I had little energy left to be actively involved in much of what was occurring in Marysville. Like so many others, I was so disillusioned and pre-occupied with my own recovery that I just had to walk away.

All that seems like a long time ago now.

Today Marysville is a different place. Fortunately, in the last few years, the foliage of old is showing promising and exciting signs of return and advancement. Amidst the rebuilding and new growth I hardly seem to notice any more the numerous people and friends missing from our pre-fire community. Many of them are dead, either killed in the fires, or of cancer since. Many other friends and work colleagues also left town after the fires, never to return, so it's hard not to think of those who died as just having left town too, and I suppose in a way, they did. We miss them. I can't help thinking that things would have been very different if some of those key business people in the town had not been killed in the fires. I wonder what they would think of the new Marysville now.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Seven: *What does it all mean ...?*

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes  
but in having new eyes.*

(Marcel Proust)

After nine months at the Narbethong house we bought a five-acre property at Gruyere, near Coldstream. It's there when things started to go badly wrong for me. By early 2010, I was suffering the cumulative effects of PTSD, anxiety, depression and stressful pressure at work. I could not go on; I was a mess. Our marriage was in trouble and I quit my job in June, 2010, after what I now realise was a mental health breakdown. Marriage counselling didn't help our relationship,<sup>197</sup> and in January, 2011 – 23 months after the fires, my wife left.

The post-Black Saturday aftermath has not been an easy one. For years it has been full of confusion and contradictions. It's been a time when it's very easy to feel like a victim, as if things were just constantly being done to us, over which we had no control. It was a very difficult time to comprehend, and that in itself provided motivation for undertaking this research. I wanted answers, and I needed to understand this monumental event we were all experiencing.

After the fire, some people's lives just seemed to unravel and fall apart, my own included. Many other people simply just disappeared, never to be seen or heard of again, and yet others seemed to respond well and, at least on the surface, barely seemed to miss a beat – just busily setting about rebuilding their lives. There were so many different reactions. Yet underneath it all, no matter what the external public appearance for most people, because of my own experience I knew there was much more going on beneath the surface.

Now, after many years of inquiry, reading, interviews, talking, research and reflection, I believe I have come to an understanding and found answers that can perhaps shed light on all that we have experienced.

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<sup>197</sup> I am of the view that the counsellor we were both seeing had little or no understanding of the cumulative effects of the traumatic disaster we had been through, did not recognise the symptoms of PTSD, and indeed, in some ways made matters worse for our relationship.

The research question asks about Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process. In the previous chapters some of their experiences have been recorded. More specifically, I now address what can be understood from those experiences. This chapter draws together the previous work, giving meaning to all that has been experienced and observed over the last eight years.

Early on in this project I began looking for themes, for what was common throughout what I and others had experienced, and what I had discovered during the course of the interviews and discussions. At first I thought many of the instances of what occurred after Black Saturday (as described in the previous three chapters) were themes in themselves, but I was wrong. Eventually I realised that all of those experiences were merely examples, or illustrations, of the predominant post-fire themes, which gradually emerged as being only two. After I had gathered and categorised all of the experiences, examples and illustrations, they all fitted into one (or at times both) of two themes, which are **attachment** and **disempowerment**. Attachment can be considered a micro-theme, mainly concerning individuals, whereas disempowerment can be considered a macro-theme concerning both individuals and the broader community.

This chapter explores and explains those two themes. It also refers to the examples, or illustrations, of our post-fire experiences, because it is the examples that illustrate the themes. The chapter then considers what those experiences of attachment, loss and grief mean for disaster recovery. The theme of attachment came as no surprise to me. Because of my previous Master's Degree research I suspected that attachment would play a role in the effects of a disaster and in the response and recovery process. However, elements of the attachment milieu with which I was not previously familiar was the special role that appraisal and searching behaviour plays within recovery, and the development of the five Ps, especially the strength of attachment to pets, and of topophilia, the love of place.

The research then led me deeper and past the role of attachment. Indeed, the depth of my experiences and observations seemed to make the concept of attachment almost only a one-dimensional explanation for what was happening – there must be

something missing, something more to it, something else I had not yet seen. Over time, through a process of reflection on my own observations and those of others, the interviews, the literature, the discussions, and attending numerous post-fire recovery conferences and seminars, I finally concluded that the other explanation about what I and others had experienced was, quite simply, disempowerment, closely followed by its cousin, solastalgia, a term that I had never previously heard. In early 2013, I attended a bushfire recovery seminar in Kinglake. It was there I learned about the concept of solastalgia from one of the speakers.<sup>198</sup> This led me in a new direction, and from that time onwards my understanding increased; everything started to make more sense and began falling into place. The concept of solastalgia is defined and examined more fully later in this chapter.

Yet even solastalgia did not seem to be a complete explanation – something still seemed to be missing. I was not satisfied that I had a complete answer to what I had experienced and what I had observed in others. It was during a chance reading of Colin Murray Parkes's early (1969) work on separation anxiety as related to attachment and loss that I first read about 'searching behaviour', which is also closely connected to 'appraisal behaviour'.<sup>199</sup> For me this was a truly Eureka moment. I thought to myself – this explains everything – and by putting all the pieces of the jigsaw together the new concept of *Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma* was born.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the two themes of attachment and disempowerment, and conclusions about solastalgia and Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (and the interpretations associated with them) are mine alone, and whilst in almost all cases they have been corroborated by others, they nevertheless, in true phenomenological tradition, remain my own perspective. Others may have a different perspective or interpretation of the bushfire survivors' experiences.<sup>200</sup>

## **Two Themes: Attachment and Disempowerment**

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<sup>198</sup> The speaker was Katrin Oliver who was at that time a Salvation Army *Pathways* Community Development and Outreach Worker operating in fire-affected areas in the Murrindindi Shire.

<sup>199</sup> Note that appraisal behaviour usually precedes searching behaviour.

<sup>200</sup> **Disclaimer:** It is important to note that in this analysis I am not speaking on behalf of the Marysville community. I make this disclaimer mindful that in the past I have been criticised by some community members for allegedly speaking on their behalf which is not the case. The views expressed in this thesis are purely my own.

Before examining these two themes in more detail, a brief synopsis of each theme will assist in providing an overall context.

### **Attachment**

The research shows that issues of attachment to the five Ps, to People, to Possessions, to Pets, to Place and to Participation, were very important to many interviewees. However, and perhaps more importantly, the survivors' broader attachment experiences came into focus initially by their appraisal and searching behaviours (*I just want to see and know*), and then later regarding their sense of self (*who am I now?*), their sense of place (*where am I now?*), their attachment to and love of their pets and animals (*are they safe?*), their attachment to and love of place (topophilia) (*what has happened to my place?*), their secure base (*everything is gone*) and their sense of community (*where have they all gone?*). All were negatively affected by the bushfire disaster. In turn, the destruction of their own properties, the loss of their homes and possessions, as well as the town of Marysville itself, all combined with what occurred in the days, weeks and months following the disaster to affect their independence, their mental health, their self-determination, their sense of community, their sense of control over their own lives, and their sense of empowerment. All of the above things are very important to everyone, as Dr Rob Gordon said to me personally:

What does the attachment tell us, give us? Why is it so important for us? It gives us identification, a sense of who we are, a sense of identity, a sense of meaning and a sense of purpose. Attachment is the first step in a long line of connections that provide us with self-worth. We feel validated and recognised.

(Gordon, 2012)

Clearly, when a disaster occurs we can be robbed of not only people, material items and our environment, but also of our identity, meaning, purpose and future. In noting the effects of trauma on attachments, Solomon (2003), concludes:

The goal of successful treatment ... is to recreate a narrative in which the person is not a victim, but the author of a new narrative, in which he or she is in control of the events in life.

(Solomon, 2003: 343)

Broken attachments of themselves are not terminal for a person's recovery. However, if a person is treated like or remains a 'victim' and does not have control over his or her own life, then recovery becomes all the more difficult. Enter disempowerment ...

### **Disempowerment**

The research shows that people's sense of control and destiny over their own and their community's affairs is deeply affected by their sense of powerlessness – their personal disempowerment, disenfranchisement and ensuing sense of dependence upon others. Disempowerment results in frustration, possible anger, a deep sadness and a sense of helplessness which may result in depression and short- or long-term mental health issues. Disempowerment also seems to contribute in large measure to the onset of solastalgia, with self-esteem and a sense of hope for the future also suffering. Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion often follow. Topophilia and solastalgia seem inextricably linked; it is unlikely that a person will experience solastalgia without having first attained topophilia. I contend that the effects of post-disaster disempowerment and solastalgia can be far-reaching and long-lasting.

In writing of empowerment and disempowerment in community development practice, Toomey (2011: 184-193) notes there are eight commonly utilised community development practices, of which some promote disempowerment, and others promote empowerment. Toomey lists four traditional roles of "rescuer, provider, modernizer and liberator" (pp 184-188) as being disempowering to communities, whereas the four "alternative" roles of "catalyst, facilitator, ally and advocate" (pp 188-192) are empowering to communities. Toomey notes:

While the enacting of traditional roles tends to result in the establishment of vertical relationships between the agents of development and their subjects, those who play alternative roles are aware that development relationships constitute a two-way street, in which both the development agent and subject must work together in order to make positive and sustainable change. On the one hand, the rescuer, provider, modernizer or liberator is inclined to dictate and to set the terms of participation; on the other hand, the catalyst, facilitator, ally or advocate is more likely to ask how to help, rather than making assumptions about what to do.

(Toomey, 2011: 193)

In using Toomey's description, it would appear that Marysville was replete with rescuers, providers, modernisers and liberators but deficient in catalysts, facilitators, allies or advocates. I believe this conclusion is well demonstrated by the illustrations we have seen in this thesis.

## **Theme One: Attachment**

Many residents viewed the *town* of Marysville, their physical *home* within Marysville, and the *relationships* they had with others in Marysville, as their secure base. They had both topophilic and Bowlbyesque attachment to their location and chose to be there. Such topophilic attachment to place included not only their homes but the town itself, along with the immediate environs of the town – the bush and the mountains. Within that environment exist the five Ps: attachment to People, to Possessions, to Pets, to Place, and to Participation (in a certain way of life, or lifestyle). For those who suffer broken attachments through a disaster, the ensuing experience of loss and grief is only natural. The theme of attachment, post-disaster broken attachments, and loss and grief, can best be described by highlighting the five elements of attachment found within the five Ps.

### **People**

The loss of people killed in a disaster is always distressing. As we saw in Chapter One, 35 people died in and around Marysville, being 27 permanent residents, two part-time residents and six tourists. Many of those who died were well-known key people in the business and social community and they are sorely missed. Yet from an attachment perspective, that is only part of the story. The hidden element of people who are no longer in Marysville is also very important. I would estimate that as many as 65% of the pre-fire Marysville population never returned.<sup>201</sup> In terms of place and participation from an attachment perspective, the social fabric of the town has been devastated, leaving people in smaller groups, needing to make new connections with others which may prove to be quite difficult for them, especially the elderly. The wholesale loss of family, friends, work colleagues, acquaintances, shop staff and just familiar faces in the street is difficult to come to terms with and of itself may provoke

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<sup>201</sup> Since the fires over 56% of Marysville properties have been sold. **Source:** Marysville Triangle Real Estate (now Professionals Marysville).

mental health issues, especially sadness and depression. Further, much personal emotional investment and time is required to build new relationships, and for some, given other stressors in their lives, that may just prove to be too difficult. For some in Marysville and surrounds this has resulted in social withdrawal and isolation, being yet another issue that has not been acknowledged or addressed, and remains a concern to this day.

## **Possessions**

As we saw in Chapter Two, possessions play a key role in most people's lives because of their personal history, the memories associated with them, their familiarity, and the sense of identity they bestow on their owners. They contribute in large measure to a person's comfort and secure base. It is little wonder that many of the interviewees spent so much time trying to find any small surviving remnant they could (behaviour replicated in disasters worldwide). This behaviour, in what I believe to be an essential part of the mourning and grieving of loss process, was blocked in a number of ways. First, by the six-week lock-out; secondly by the additional destruction carried out in many cases by government authorities, thirdly, by thefts from many properties because of a lack of policing and site protection (often because the property owners were not allowed back to their homes) and fourthly, by the later clean-up by Grocon. It is now clear that these actions by authorities in fact prevented and blocked the normal appraisal and searching behaviours so necessary for survivors' healthy responses to loss, and the timely processing of grief.

Many people, myself included, spent a good deal of time searching through the rubble for any precious items that may have survived the fires. Many found such items, but most were ruined either by the fire, the rain, or subsequent interference by third parties. People put them in boxes and stored them away. Indeed, as Cheryl said: "Oh, all that stuff's in boxes under the [new] house – I'll sort it out one day". Perhaps that "one day" may never come, but that doesn't seem to matter. What's important is that there seems to be a certain comfort and security in just knowing that some old possessions are still there, even in boxes under the house.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Most of my own retrieved remains from my destroyed home sit in many boxes in a shipping container. I too will sort them out one day, but for now I'm content to know that something of my past life sits securely in storage, waiting to be grieved over once more some day in the future.

Perhaps this element of post-disaster attachment appraisal and searching behaviour, the 'need to know', the 'need to see the body', the 'need to touch', can be better understood and considered by authorities in their responses to disaster. There is a fine balance between safety – protecting people for their own good – and the mental and emotional anguish of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma that can occur if people are prevented from returning early to their own property and being able to engage in the early essential loss and grief attachment behaviours of appraisal and searching.

What I did not expect to find in the interviews was that after the disaster most people seemed to actually place less value on the importance of material possessions than they had before it. For me personally, that was not the case. However, the result does confirm what is in the existing literature (see ACPMH, 2009: 13.)

### **Pets**

Also of great surprise to me in the interviews was the intensity with which people experienced attachment to their pets, and even to pets that were not theirs. Of particular interest was the case of one survivor, Brent, who left his car and possessions behind so he could save another person's budgerigars. Brent told me:

Cheryl had brought over her budgerigars from the little flat she was renting; she'd put them in this tall cage. When we were evacuating I said, "We'll put your budgies in the back of the work van," which I assumed she'd drive. Turns out Cheryl didn't have a driver's licence, so when I got to my house Cheryl'd gone off in another car and left the van behind with the budgies. There's no way I could have got her budgie cage in my car and I'm looking and my mind just went, 'Okay, you've got two budgerigars that Cheryl's said, "I couldn't stand to see my birds die."' And the other side of my brain's thinking, 'Okay, you've got \$20,000 worth of uninsured music stuff in your car sitting there.' And within 30 seconds, I just drove off in the van with the budgerigars. I left my car and everything and, of course, everything perished; my house, totally all my belongings and my car.

There are of course many elements to consider here. Highlighted is the muddled thinking that occurs when people are extremely stressed and facing imminent danger. Brent's situation was by no means unique and little different from my own as a strong example of the need to save animals. As I recounted in Chapter Four, I had left the house with nothing but the dog, a drink for the dog and me, and some dog food ... no

wallet, no documents, no photographs, no computer, nothing. Was that muddled thinking, or a panic of life-saving priorities? What is remarkable about this is that it took me a number of years to see and understand, that, like so many others, I too had prioritised our dog over all else; that is attachment to pets, and the same may apply to other domestic and non-domestic animals. It is important not to underestimate the strength of these attachments, as people are known to have died in Kinglake and other places on Black Saturday attempting to save their animals, and most recently, as noted in Chapter Two, in November, 2015, three backpackers working on a cattle station in Western Australia died trying to save a horse.<sup>203</sup>

I am pleased to note that in recent years this matter has been recognised and is now the subject of more research.<sup>204</sup> Authorities are now encouraging people to make their pets and animals an integral part of their fire plans and preparation. Of course, for many this will mean they will stay and defend their property rather than leave their pets and animals behind, perhaps placing their own lives in jeopardy.

## **Place**

As we saw in Chapter Two, place is a myriad of things whereby people identify strongly with a certain location, view themselves as belonging there as an insider, and not belonging somewhere else. Place is concerned with the physical town itself (the houses, shops, streets, gardens and trees), the surrounding bush and environment generally, along with one's own home within that place, and the participation (lifestyle) they have with other people at that place. Over time and given the right positive experiences in that location, a topophilic attachment develops that provides a person with a secure base from which to operate. Consequently, as a result of such place attachment there is a desire not to want to leave that place, and to want to protect it at all costs. Interviewees have expressed their distress at what has happened to their surrounding environment and the milieu of flora and fauna within it. Whilst they can feel and express sympathy for what has happened to other people in other places, it is their own place that remains of primary concern because of all that it means to them.

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<sup>203</sup> Source: <http://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/three-backpackers-who-died-in-wa-fires-were-trying-to-save-a-horse/news-story/3cc872062f7b8610def2a189ff496c67>

<sup>204</sup> See for example: Taylor, Lynch, Burns and Eustace, (2015). The preparedness and evacuation behaviour of pet owners in emergencies and natural disasters. (AJEM).

I have concluded that strongly held attachment to place, and sense of place, is what makes so problematic the older government policy of 'Stay-or-Go', and the newer government policy of 'Leave Early'. It explains why much research shows that in the event of an impending fire, so many people elect to take a wait-and-see approach.<sup>205</sup> The Stay-or-Go and Leave Early policies should be seen in the context of attachment and topophilia, the love of one's place, and the desire to protect it (and what it holds and means) at all costs. Forced evacuations should also be seen in the context of attachment behaviour, disempowerment and loss of control over one's own affairs.

As noted earlier, up to 65% of the Marysville town population did not return after the fires. This does not mean they had no place attachment and had not experienced topophilia. There are many other factors that come into play, principally employment and the school needs of children. Many people I interviewed who had left Marysville were heartbroken about having to leave, but other pressures caused them to go. That said, as Marysville recovers and regains some of its former beauty, some of those who left are now, years later, returning to live once more in the place they love. That is real topophilia.

## **Participation**

One of the principal post-fire factors that people found difficult to come to terms with was the loss of what can broadly be described as 'lifestyle', their way of life, including such things as their daily routine, employment, leisure activities, favourite shops, social life and friendship and hobby groups. Their lifestyle included not only going to work or operating a business, but everything else they did out of work hours. By way of two examples, pre-fire there was a group of about 25 people who attended ballroom dancing classes in Marysville. After the fires not only did that group no longer meet, but the dancing instructor had been killed in the inferno. That group ceased to exist and most of the participants were disbursed far and wide. There was also a church fellowship group of about 20 adults and children that met every Monday night. After the fire, they too never met again, the participants having disbursed around Victoria.

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<sup>205</sup> See the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre's "Evaluation of Stay or Go Policy" at: <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/projects/c6/evaluation-stay-or-go-policy> and "History backs 'Stay or Go Early' Policy" at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/history-backs-stay-or-go-early-policy-20090212-85xt.html>. See also Claire's comment on page 120, lines 22-23.

People's routines and social lives came to an abrupt halt, mostly never to recommence. For those who remained in Marysville, with many now living in the new Temporary Village, a new life with new routines had to be developed, and new friendships made. This was and is emotionally draining; the loss of a certain routines and the broken attachments that go along with that, is another contributor to solastalgia. Repair of such broken attachments is in some cases possible; however, because of destroyed infrastructure, most have to start rebuilding their participation from scratch. Fortunately, many new groups have been established, such as the Men's Shed,<sup>206</sup> the Triangle Steel Bands *Pans On Fire* music group,<sup>207</sup> the Football and Netball Club,<sup>208</sup> and many pre-fire organisations have been re-invigorated, including the RSL,<sup>209</sup> CFA, SES, and various arts groups. In addition, a number of pre-fire businesses have returned, so there is to some extent a sense of familiarity, despite the visual appearance of the new buildings and the lack of substantial vegetation. Recovery and rebuilding of attachment to participation takes a long time.

## Summary

Attachment and the above-listed five Ps of attachment behaviour play a vital role in disaster response and recovery. If not managed well by disaster response and recovery agencies, Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma will most likely result, perhaps closely followed by the onset of solastalgia. In turn, this may lead to reduced resilience, protracted recovery, complicated grief and the possibility of longer-term mental health recovery issues that may include anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and exacerbated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

## Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT)

My research and experience shows that Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT) manifests itself when disaster survivors are denied the opportunity to be involved in essential attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour. As noted in Chapters One and Two, PDAT is a newly-identified phenomenon with new terminology that

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<sup>206</sup> See: [http://www.blacksaturdaymuseum.com/mens\\_shed-1.htm](http://www.blacksaturdaymuseum.com/mens_shed-1.htm)

<sup>207</sup> See: <http://www.trianglesteebands.com/the-bands/pans-on-fire.html>

<sup>208</sup> See: <http://www.marysvillefc.com.au/>

<sup>209</sup> RSL: Returned and Services League of Australia; an organisation for serving and returned ex-services defence personnel, family, friends and others.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Returned\\_and\\_Services\\_League\\_of\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Returned_and_Services_League_of_Australia)

describes the post-disaster anxiety, stress and trauma experienced by disaster survivors. It is directly related to the disruption of innate loss and grief-related attachment behaviour that seemingly all humans exhibit. Hence, 'Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma' is a neologism not found in any literature to date and, to reiterate, my definition is as follows:

*The occurrence of external post-disaster events (over which disaster survivors have little or no control) which when combined with the normal spontaneous human expressions of loss and grief innate to human attachment behaviour produces a disruption to the natural processing of early human loss and grief responses, particularly in relation to initial appraisal and searching behaviours, thereby resulting in further trauma which exacerbates stress, anger, grief, frustration and anxiety, which may then delay and complicate grieving and recovery.*

The combination of my interviews with survivors, the literature on attachment, grief and loss, and my own experiences have all combined to reveal that for those individually and collectively affected by post-disaster events that are beyond their control and that interfere with their normal (attachment-based) processing of loss and grief, a second disaster is experienced. That second disaster is deeply personal, yet I further contend that when ordinary human Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma responses are combined with other post-disaster recovery events that may also prove to be traumatic and frustrating this too will become a contributor to, and may lead to, disempowerment, individual and collective depression, solastalgia, longer-term mental health issues, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and for some, suicidal ideation. Attachment behaviour is a very powerful feature and force within the human schema. Its effects should be given much more credence within the field of disaster research, response and management.

## **Theme Two – Disempowerment**

A strong theme emerging through many interviews, both formal and informal, was the depth of disempowerment felt by survivors. Whilst 'disempowerment' is not a word many necessarily used themselves, it is the word that encapsulates what they have expressed of their experience. Both disempowerment and disenfranchisement

emerged from the interviews. It is worth noting once more the subtle difference between disempowerment ('to deprive of influence, importance and power') and disenfranchisement ('to deny a privilege or right and/or to deny having a representative at an elected body').<sup>210</sup> Both were extensively experienced by post-fire survivors.

The disempowerment of both individuals and the community began even before the fire hit Marysville, as occurred through the lack of any warning of the approaching firestorm, with tragic and fatal consequences. The lack of warning to the townspeople created a disempowering sense of having been neglected, forgotten about and deserted. As early as 3.30pm on Black Saturday, Mt Gordon fire-spotter Andy Willans saw what he described as "a monster" fire approaching Marysville (Kissane, 2009b; Rule and Murdoch, 2009; VBRC, 2010a: 150ff.; Willans, 2012). He alerted the CFA and (the then) DSE<sup>211</sup> controllers in Alexandra who decided he must be exaggerating, so did not issue any 'Red Flag'<sup>212</sup> evacuation warnings for Marysville or surrounds. By the time the authorities realised the severity of the fire it was too late. This of itself caused a great deal of post-fire stress for many, not to mention the number of lives lost unnecessarily through the lack of time and escape options once the firestorm arrived. Whilst there is an enormous amount of material to examine, I have noted four key areas in which to focus illustrations of individual and community disempowerment. They are as follows:

### **The Lock-out**

As we saw in Chapter Five, the lock-out was and remains a great source of stress for many. The six-week lock-out from Marysville was unnecessary. It contributed to exacerbated levels of continuing stress, further damage to and thefts from properties, and, as I have now identified, to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. To this day many survivors still speak of the lock-out as being one of, if not *the* most stressful of all their post-fire experiences. I conclude that in being prevented from engaging in

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<sup>210</sup> **Source:** Brown, 2007: 693 & 702; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/disempower> and <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/disenfranchise?s=t>

<sup>211</sup> DSE: Department of Sustainability and Environment; now DELWP, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

<sup>212</sup> "'Red Flag' warnings are signals that incident management objectives need to be reviewed, if not altered, on the basis of threats to safety." **Source:** *Red Flags and Watch-Outs for Rugged Landforms*. [http://www.highfirerisk.com.au/extras/red\\_flag\\_conditions.pdf](http://www.highfirerisk.com.au/extras/red_flag_conditions.pdf) p 2.

necessary appraisal and searching behaviour to deal with the early stages of processing their loss and grief, many people (unknowingly) suffered Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. This element of post-disaster (especially fire) lock-out response has been repeated over and over again, being seen in the 2013 post-Dunalley fire period in Tasmania, the 2013 post-Blue Mountains fire period in New South Wales (NSW), and more recently in the 2015 post-Wye River fire period in Victoria. Police post-fire lock-outs seem to be repeated in the same manner over and over again with little understanding of, or regard for, the effects the lock-out has on survivors' attachment responses. This is an important area to be addressed.

Lock-outs are disempowering because they prevent property owners from a timely return to their own properties to see what has happened to it and, if applicable, to pets and livestock (appraisal behaviour). This state of not knowing can be very stressful, damaging, and have long-term repercussions. It is strongly connected to attachment behaviour and the natural human loss and grief response. The authorities seem to be of the view that people's personal safety is paramount, and therefore 'ordinary people' should be kept out, and only 'experts' allowed in. Clearly whilst to some extent personal safety is paramount, once a fire-front has passed the actual danger to individuals is minimal. Yet a lock-out can create immediate mental anguish and lasting emotional damage and psychological injury – hence Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. In this matter people should not be treated as incompetent to look after their own needs and wellbeing, and thereby disempowered by the state. The whole concept of post-disaster lock-outs must be radically re-thought in light of the evidence of personal trauma and psychological damage suffered by those prevented from gaining timely access to their own properties.

### **Property Rights, the Clean-up and Community Empowerment**

From Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, the day after Black Saturday, what I and other residents began to experience was the erosion of our property rights. As we have seen above, the lock-out had detrimental flow-on effects which not only affected people's attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour (contributing to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma), but also in essence constituted a breach of people's property rights to have unfettered access to their own property. The lock-out itself has been dealt with at length in Chapter Five and despite the police having authority to close

roads, the actual legality of preventing people from accessing their own property can be questioned.

However, it did not end there. The clean-up was also problematic in terms of attachment behaviour, disempowerment and property rights (again contributing to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma). As we also saw in Chapter Five, the removal of people's motor vehicles was distressing for some, and the way in which many properties were rapidly cleaned up has also proved a recurring issue for some. As noted in Chapters Five and Six, the unrealistically positive account of the clean-up by Nixon and Hanna (2011: 192-195) is far from the experience of many local people and was not as positive as Nixon and Hanna describe. All of this speaks of survivors' loss of control over what remains of their secure base and the traumatic interference with searching behaviour, again contributing to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma.

As we saw in Chapter Six, there were further difficulties that remained unaddressed about local employment opportunities during the clean-up. Many involved were left feeling disappointed and angry. What Nixon and Hanna (2011) fail to mention are the actual negative experiences of so many property owners subject to the clean-up, like my own as described in Chapter Five. The level of disempowerment felt by survivors regarding their property rights, and the attitude of government, are best shown by the following statement:

If left to property owners, clean-up will be slow and patchy at best. To achieve rapid action following a large scale disaster, government will need to initiate and coordinate the program.

(Nixon and Hanna, 2011: 194)

This is to say that individuals and communities are incapable of planning and managing their own affairs. There are many problems with this statement. First, where is the evidence for it? Secondly, when have people actually been given the opportunity to carry out such a clean-up themselves and failed? Thirdly, what is the hurry anyway? And fourthly, where are the considerations as to how best involve people and communities in cooperation with government to initiate their own self-managed clean-up and recovery? People do actually have the right to participate and manage their own lives. Nixon and Hanna's patronising manner is disappointing. It

seems to value a rapid clean up over the concept of a partnership with property owners and the community to augment their individual recovery and their emotional and psychological mental health.

In speaking about the effectiveness of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), a 2010 Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) report noted, “Empowerment of the Authority is essential for success” (p 8). The report continues in some detail about community engagement yet never speaks about the empowerment of the community, or of giving a community control over its own recovery. It would seem that at all times government is to take charge and keep it, and that community committees only provide “support to the recovery Authority ... in line with the overall statewide strategy” (p 16). Again, with perhaps the best of intentions, government disaster recovery efforts continually seem to display an authoritarian and pyramidal approach. This often leads to the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of individuals and whole communities, along with an inevitable dependence upon government. In turn this can lead to complicated mental health issues for those so affected. There must be a better way to do disaster recovery, and I am sure there is.

## **Consultations**

As we have seen in Chapter Six, there were many post-fire consultations. In particular, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission’s Leave to Appear process proved to be very frustrating for some. We felt ignored. What we had been through just did not seem to matter, and having been specifically asked to tell our story, it then seemed that in actual fact nobody wanted to hear it after all. This was very disappointing and disempowering.

The next major consultation was the Phoenix Workshop and again, as we saw in Chapter Six, for many it represented the first taste of exclusion and of the community not really being heard at all. Unfortunately, this was a process that was to continue for some time, again being seen in the Vibe Hotel consultation held in February, 2012, as also noted in Chapter Six. In quoting Sewell (2007), Ingham and Redshaw (2017) note, “...we have moved into a very dangerous place when “consultation” is used as a disguise rather than a genuine interest in engaging the needs of any community...” (p 56). This “disguise” took the form of outsiders ‘consulting with the community’, but

then making their own decisions about what they thought best for us. To sum up the feeling of many in the community, I repeat Max's words, "They tick all the [consultation] boxes on their forms, and then afterwards go ahead and do what they like."

## **Rebuilding**

Again, as was discussed in detail in Chapter Six, the rebuilding process of infrastructure and government buildings was fraught. Examples include the supermarket car park, the unnecessary re-alignment of Darwin Street (which altered the whole layout of the business precinct of the town), the construction of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre building, the School, the Community Centre, the Police Station, the Men's Shed, and most recently, the Vibe Hotel. All of these constructions met with controversy that would have been unnecessary had local concerns been listened to and addressed in the first place. As a result, the Marysville community now has new infrastructure that many see as inappropriate, impractical, not in keeping with the original spirit of the town, and indeed, just plain ugly. To sum up the feeling of many in the community, I again repeat Max's words, "We're not the beneficiaries of these projects; we're the victims of them."

By way of example, the ABC 7.30 program (aired on 12-1-2015)<sup>213</sup> reported on issues affecting the post-fire recovery of Marysville, and specifically in relation to the new Community Centre. Madeline Morris (the ABC 7.30 reporter) had this to say: "And as far as some residents are concerned, the building's a white elephant ... The problem, locals say, is that they didn't ask for it, and they don't feel like they own it". The program interviews some locals, all of whom were pre-fire residents, were in Marysville at the time of the fire, and had actively taken part in the town's recovery since. Ms Harris said, "We should have had something a bit smaller – it was a bit grand I think"; Mr Peart opined, "We're the ones left carrying the can trying to pay for these sorts of buildings"; Mr Walters said, "People suggested requirements of the community, and a lot of those weren't listened to and we got something that we didn't even want". Ex-Murrindindi Shire Mayor Lyn Gunter asked, "Who made these decisions? [about what was to be built] ... I think it comes down to the levels of government, all of them, federal, state and local, and doing a lot more and providing a

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<sup>213</sup> Source: <http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/7-30/NC1481H016S00#playing>

lot more information to communities on what assets need to go back for a sustainable future for people”. Marysville local, Mr Guscott, concluded, “unfortunately, when architects get involved and get a bit of a free hand and some sort of a brief, you get things different to what you originally perceived”. In response, Jack Archer (Deputy CEO, Regional Australia Institute) observed: “The work that Regional Australia Institute’s done has shown we’ve got the balance wrong. It shows we’ve been over-investing in infrastructure and under-investing in understanding the economy in that process of recovery. And often that’s actually things that can have a much more significant influence, particularly early, in that longer-term recovery process”. He is correct.

In Chapter Two (pp 31-32) I noted disaster psychologist Dr Rob Gordon’s warning of a ‘second disaster’, that if people “...devote themselves so fully to the hard work [*of rebuilding*] that they neglect the rest of their lives, and that’s often where what is sometimes called the ‘second disaster’ happens ...” (Ogilvie, 2013). As we have seen, this is only one part of the second disaster story. It consists of not only what Gordon speaks, but also, and perhaps equally importantly, the disaster of disempowerment. People see their devastated community being rebuilt around them yet feel excluded and powerless to do anything about how it occurs. They sense the process is being monopolised by outsiders and many interviewees spoke of such feelings. It is this second disaster of disempowerment and disenfranchisement that may lead to dependence.<sup>214</sup> It may also contribute to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, perhaps leading to the onset of depression, along with protracted issues of loss and grief (including issues of complicated and disenfranchised grief) and to solastalgia.

## Summary

To conclude, disempowerment is insidious; it is often difficult to recognise until it is too late. When survivors are already suffering the immediate shock of the disaster and reeling from the myriad effects of broken attachments (the five Ps as discussed earlier) then disempowerment is something unexpected. It almost always occurs with would-be helpful outsiders, yet often also assisted by inconsiderate insiders (perhaps sometimes with an agenda of their own). As we shall see in the next section, issues of

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<sup>214</sup> When disempowered and disenfranchised disaster survivors are excluded from active participation in their own recovery, dependence upon state authorities can be the result. (See: Sanderson, 2016).

attachment and disempowerment can have a great effect upon the processing of loss and grief in disaster recovery.

## **Attachment, Disempowerment, and Loss and Grief in Disaster Recovery**

In further addressing the research questions, this section considers how the two themes of attachment and disempowerment are connected to the experience of loss and grief in disaster recovery, and in particular, how they may contribute to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. As we saw in Chapter Two, disasters come in many forms of which bushfire is but one. The literature about disaster response is extensive. It addresses questions regarding planning for disaster, emergency response management in disaster contexts, and individual and community responses to disaster. Conceptually, it draws attention to questions about preparedness, experience, impact, recovery and resilience. Disaster is a traumatic event that dramatically disrupts individual, community and social functioning. As Stimpson (2005) notes, “even moderate disasters affect mental health” (p 39), although Bonanno, et al., (2010) note that “serious psychological and physical impairment was almost always observed in only a minority of the exposed population” (p 3). This is also seen to be true after Black Saturday.

I found within the interviewed cohort that the most prominent feelings occurred when there was a crossing over and mixing of the two themes, attachment and disempowerment. From an attachment perspective, it would seem that whenever a person’s secure base was threatened (or destroyed), combined with when they were then disempowered (ie: unable to do anything about it), that is when people became the most distressed, and that is when Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma also occurs, as was exhibited by those I interviewed. It would appear that the felt-distress is long-lasting, the best example as we have noted earlier being the lock-out experience because of its extended effect upon attachment-based appraisal and searching behaviours that are essential to set the grieving process on its proper course.

In writing about “conditions that aid or hinder healthy mourning”, Bowlby (1979b) states (in summary) that the most intense and most disturbing effects aroused by loss

are: 1) a fear of being abandoned; 2) a yearning for the lost figure; and 3) anger that the lost figure cannot be found” (p 113). Bowlby further notes that these effects are related to: 1) the urge to search for the lost figure, and 2) a tendency to reproach angrily anyone who seems to the bereaved to be responsible for the loss, or to be hindering recovery of the lost person (p 113). All the effects Bowlby lists are what can be observed of survivors’ responses to being locked-out of their town (and away from their secure base) and also regarding elements of the clean-up process. I doubt that the authorities were aware of any of these deeply emotional, psychological and quite natural human reactions as a part of the normal human cycle of loss and grief attachment behaviour. I concluded that to delay people’s return to their home, to their secure base, is to extend and exacerbate their distress through Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, perhaps even causing their grief to become entrenched, complicated and protracted.

To further complicate matters, Gordon (2009a & 2011) speaks of the post-disaster process of “bonding, fusion, debonding and conflict”, and during the resolution phase, a period of “differentiation and integration” (p 16-17). Gordon suggests there are two types of post-disaster psycho-social injury: first “Impact Injury” (which is the first disaster) and secondly, “Recovery Injury” (that is now sometimes referred to as the second disaster) and these injuries can compound each other. Gordon (2009a) therefore posits that there needs to be two types of psycho-social intervention: First, the treatment of Impact Injury, and secondly, the treatment of Recovery Injury (p 16-17). I contend that the authorities devote most resources to Impact Injury. Recovery Injury (which is where Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma is found) is little understood in terms of both intensity and duration, and hence receives less attention and fewer long-term resources. Gordon (2009a) also notes a number of “liabilities” that will hinder recovery. They include a “lack of control over restoration, rebuilding and replacement; not being listened to and being preached to by experts; and a lack of cooperation from recovery agencies” (p 30). These liabilities exacerbate delays in individual and collective recovery, contribute to the Recovery Injury (the second disaster), a sense of powerlessness and depression, and promote the onset of solastalgia.

Perhaps there was no one at all involved in the post-Black Saturday response and recovery that had any understanding about issues of attachment, topophilia, a secure base, appraisal and searching behaviour and solastalgia. I suspect that to be the case.<sup>215</sup> Yet if there was, they were certainly unable to make that known, bring it to the surface or apply it in any meaningful way.

Based upon their research of the disastrous 2003 Canadian British Columbia McLure wildfire that affected the town of Barriere<sup>216</sup> and wiped out the hamlet of Louis Creek, Kulig, Kimmel, Gullacher, Reimer, Townshend, Edge and Lightfoot, (2010) suggest that at the communal level, resilient communities work “collectively alongside each other” and they “naturally develop a sense of belonging” which assists in their collective problem solving that can then be coupled with external “input and new ideas” (p 7). Kulig, et al., (2010) further suggest that for this to be successful, survivors “need to feel a sense of community attachment and social connectedness” (p 11). In an ideal world, community cohesiveness, self-determination, attachment, connectedness and strength should be built before any disaster occurs and before outside intervention asserts its authority. Regarding the empowerment of individuals and communities, Kulig, et al., (2010) are of the view that:

Rural communities possess a depth that is built from shared history, shared relationships and shared activities. When disaster strikes, citizens can be counted on to meet the needs of their community, both by anticipating the needs and responding to the communicated needs that are described by local officials and media.

(Kulig, et al., 2010: 11)

But they have to be given the chance to do this (the opposite of that suggested earlier by Nixon and Hanna, 2011: 194). They have to be empowered to make decisions and not disenfranchised and rendered powerless. Also in writing of the 2003 British Columbia wildfires, Cox and Perry (2011) note that “in the context of an examination of disasters and disaster resilience, place cannot easily be ignored as a primary factor in experience of social capital” and that after a disaster “the sudden and sometimes

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<sup>215</sup> Not one person I have spoken to in the last 4½ years since I first heard of solastalgia and appraisal and searching behaviour had ever heard of them before.

<sup>216</sup> In 2011 I visited the city of Kelowna, the town of Barriere and the hamlet of Louis Creek in British Columbia, talking to many residents about their 2003 fire experiences and recovery. For more information, see [www.barrierebc.com](http://www.barrierebc.com) and [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McLure\\_Fire](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McLure_Fire)

devastating displacement can be the cause of profound feelings of grief and anxiety” (p 396). Expatriation from place creates barriers to resilience and recovery (perhaps Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma) that must be acknowledged by those seeking to help with the rebuilding process. However, in the wake of disaster, the news is not all bad. The Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) notes:

Many people who have lived through a disaster develop new skills and view themselves and their families in a more positive light, place less importance on material possessions, develop closer bonds with their community and feel a sense of pride in their recovery.

(ACPMH, 2009: 13)

In most cases, this is what my research has shown, and whilst the above may not always be experienced in every case, it is true that post-traumatic growth can be very positive for many people. Recovering from a disaster cannot be about physically returning to what was, nor is resilience a mere bouncing-back to a pre-disaster psychological state. It is about moving towards new future possibilities that the community and the individuals within it must play an active part in creating for themselves, and a much more active part than those coming in from the outside to assist. Also, they shall have to continue creating their own future long after all of the outside support is gone.

To summarise, when attachment related appraisal and searching behaviour is prevented and then combined with disempowerment, this may produce Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, which may take many years from which to recover. Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma may contribute to depression and bring about the onset of solastalgia, as we shall see below. From recent discussions with survivors, even now eight years post-disaster, it would appear that whilst most people recover over time, the effects of the disaster remain plainly evident for many.

### **Enter Solastalgia ...**

‘Solastalgia’ is a neologism created by Albrecht in 2003, a concept and definition that has now entered into the accepted research lexicon and whose evolution is described below. Albrecht summarises solastalgia as “The homesickness you have when you are still at home...” and when “...you feel dislocated but you haven’t gone anywhere”

(2010). As Albrecht told me personally, “The neologism was created out of three concepts; solace, desolation and nostalgia” (2013). In this context solace is defined as “comfort or consolation in sorrow, distress, disappointment or tedium” (Brown, 2007: 2910). To be desolate is to be “left alone, lonely, lacking in joy or comfort, forlorn, wretched, abandoned, ruinous, barren, neglected, friendless, forsaken, made wretched, overwhelmed with misery” (Brown, 2007: 659). So desolation is defined as “deprivation of comfort; grief; solitariness, a feeling of wretchedness or loneliness” (Brown, 2007: 659). Where there is no solace, there is desolation; there is solastalgia.

As Albrecht (2005) concludes, “hence, literally, Solastalgia is the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one’s home and territory” (p 45; see also Oliver, 2012). Solastalgia is the feeling of despair one has when one is still in the same physical location, but that physical location has altered so radically that it is barely recognisable as home any more. As we shall see, these definitions are important in giving meaning to feelings expressed by many (but by no means all) post-fire current and ex-residents of Marysville. Indeed, Albrecht sums it up well:

It is the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation. It is an intense desire for the place where one is a resident to be maintained in a state that continues to give comfort or solace. Solastalgia ... is the ‘lived experience’ of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the present. In short, Solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’.

(Albrecht, 2005: 45)

The connections to Bowlby’s secure base are obvious, as are the connections to attachment-related loss and grief appraisal and searching behaviour along with Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. What Albrecht has achieved is to provide a new word to describe a psychoterratic feeling, a sense of being with observable outcomes; of what happens when one’s place of attachment, one’s topophilic home, is under threat, is notably changed, or partially or totally destroyed.

By way of example, when speaking about her experiences of homesickness (the origin of nostalgia), Wood (2013) described the feeling variously as both “a hollow ache in my chest and deep, remorseful longing for home”, and a “strange sadness” (p 38). She asked, “Why does it feel so physical – a hollow ache radiating from just below my sternum – when it’s so clearly a spectre of the mind?” (p 38). Wood sums up her feeling with the words, “*I just want to go home*” (p 38, italics hers). It is a hard feeling to put into words, but it is recognisable when felt. With nostalgia (specifically, homesickness), one can always go home, but with disaster and solastalgia, there is no home to go back to. As Wood concludes:

With the disconnection from home, it seems my complete self somehow goes missing. Without my house and my bloke and my friends, my garden and my neighbourhood, I feel I’m not quite whole; crucial, life affirming layers of identity are missing. It’s a subtle but critical estrangement from the self.

(Wood, 2013: 38)

Wood echoes what Belk (2010), Butler, (2004) and Tuan (1980) found, as noted in Chapter Two. Solastalgia is a breakdown of the secure base. As Wood says above so well – “crucial, life affirming layers of identity are missing”. It is a subtle but critical estrangement from the self that results in a permeating sadness. Such experiences seem to be universal to the human condition.

Whilst the concept of solastalgia has been broadly welcomed, the Queensland Government’s Department of Health report into possible health effects of Coal Seam Gas operations in Tara, Queensland (Queensland Health, 2013: 17) curiously cited solastalgia as a possible cause of physical and emotional symptoms reported by locals. At face value, this report’s use of solastalgia could be interpreted as an attempt to discredit the genuine health effects declared by people in Tara. It would be disappointing if the very useful and valid concept of solastalgia were to become associated with ghost-symptoms and feigned-illness.

Solastalgia, then, is about the deep effect upon people and communities of rapid unwanted change which forever alters the sameness of a place. According to Relph, (1976) it is a ‘sameness’ and ‘unity’ which gives a location its unique identity, and that sameness (ie: a place remaining the same) is what provides a sense of place, and the unity is what provides a sense of community (common-unity). After a disaster, the

physical and social reconstruction of communities is not therefore simply a matter of putting back in place all or some of the infrastructure. We must ask what can be done to assist a community to physically and socially reconstruct itself in a manner which will most assist that community to keep or to replicate that sense of place, that sameness, which existed prior to the disaster. I assert this is not what happened after the disaster in Marysville.

By way of practical visual examples of solastalgia, **Figures 7.1 to 7.6** below clearly juxtapose and demonstrate the changed natural and built environment resulting from the 2009 bushfires that the inhabitants of Marysville and the Triangle district now see and live with every day.

### **Soliphilia – a remedy?**

During a TEDx Talk,<sup>217</sup> Albrecht (2010) says the remedy to solastalgia is “soliphilia”; another neologism he created in 2009 which denotes “an antidote to Solastalgia”. Etymologically, the *sol* is from *solidarity* with meanings: “a union of interests, purposes, or sympathies among members of a group; a fellowship of responsibilities and interests” and from the French *solidarité*, from *solidaire*, or *interdependent*.<sup>218</sup> Albrecht has defined soliphilia as “the love of the totality of our place relationships and a willingness to accept, in solidarity and affiliation with others, the political responsibility for the health of the earth, our home ... It is three parts: love of unity, solidarity, and solace secured. ... Soliphilia is a practical action” (Albrecht, 2010).

Mason (2010) further defines Albrecht’s soliphilia as,

... the love of and responsibility for a place, bioregion, planet and the unity of interrelated interests within it. Soliphilia is associated with positivity, interconnectedness and personal empowerment. If we can make our psychological defense against solastalgia into the positive manifestation of soliphilia, then we can definitely improve the interplay between human beings and their environment for generations to come.

(Mason, 2010: 2)

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<sup>217</sup> A ‘TEDx Talk’ (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is a “short powerful presentation designed to help the spread of ideas”. **Source:** <https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization>

<sup>218</sup> <http://home.iprimus.com.au/tammie1/Soliphilia%20etymology.htm>



**Figure 7.1:** Pre-fire mature forest near Marysville looking west, showing the stately stands of compact and integrated eucalypts.<sup>219</sup>



**Figure 7.2:** Post-fire forest in April, 2013, near Marysville looking east, showing stands of dead eucalypts in the mountains adjacent to the town. Note the epicormic growth on the ragged eucalypts in the middle foreground and the relatively unaffected and recovered trees in the immediate foreground.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.

<sup>220</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.



**Figure 7.3:** A section of the pre-fire main street of Marysville showing the Ski Hire entrance, In-Neutral Restaurant and the Foodworks Supermarket and Newsagency.<sup>221</sup>



**Figure 7.4:** A section of the same post-fire main street of Marysville, January, 2017, showing the new realigned roadway and vacant land. In relation to **Fig 7.3** above, the Lolly Shop sign is in the same place as the Ski Hire shop's Yeti snowman sign; the new recently-opened Duck Inn is on the site of the In-Neutral Restaurant; the Supermarket has been replaced by the realignment of Darwin Street, and the overhanging oak tree is gone.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>221</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: Black Saturday Museum, Marysville, courtesy Barry Thomas.

<sup>222</sup> **Source:** Author's collection. Image: David Barton.



**Figure 7.5:** Narbethong Hall, looking east pre-2009, before being razed on Black Saturday.<sup>223</sup>



**Figure 7.6:** The new post-fire, postmodern, and ‘fire-resistant’ Narbethong Hall, April, 2013, looking east.<sup>224</sup>

If solastalgia is the lived experience of negative change, then soliphilia is the lived action of positive change, of communities “collaborating in soliphilia” (Albrecht, 2010). But is this enough? Albrecht describes a community of people in the NSW Hunter Valley taking the NSW Government to Court in a bid to stop further desecration of their agricultural land. Initially they won, but the Government then changed the law, so ultimately, they failed (Albrecht, 2010). So as Mason noted

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<sup>223</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: Black Saturday Museum, Marysville, courtesy Barry Thomas.

<sup>224</sup> **Source:** Author’s collection. Image: David Barton.

above, soliphilia must include personal empowerment, and indeed, collective empowerment. Without empowerment of both individuals and communities, little can be achieved. I do not believe that soliphilia at this time is possible, because, as argued, the people of Marysville were disempowered and the collective empowerment required for soliphilia to be effective has not been realised. Consequently, for the moment soliphilia appears little more than a theoretical position that, to be blunt, cannot assist those coping with post-fire solastalgia or Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. Perhaps that will change over time, but not without recognition by those in authority of the concept of solastalgia and Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma.<sup>225</sup>

So to conclude, it is possible to develop a flow-through model of what a community and the individuals within it experience both pre- and post-disaster. The model, as shown at **Figure 7.7** below, describes the pre-disaster condition (in light green), the advent of a major disaster (in red), and the effects of that disaster (listed from 1 to 5) upon the community and the individuals within it (in yellow). The result of the effects of the disaster is noted (in tan) and the long-term resolution following on from the disaster is described (in dark and light blue). While the model is based on findings in relation to Marysville, I hold that it describes a general pattern of experience also transferable to other disasters. If so, is there a better way to respond to and manage such disasters?

### **The Community Development Approach – A Better Way for Post-disaster Recovery?**

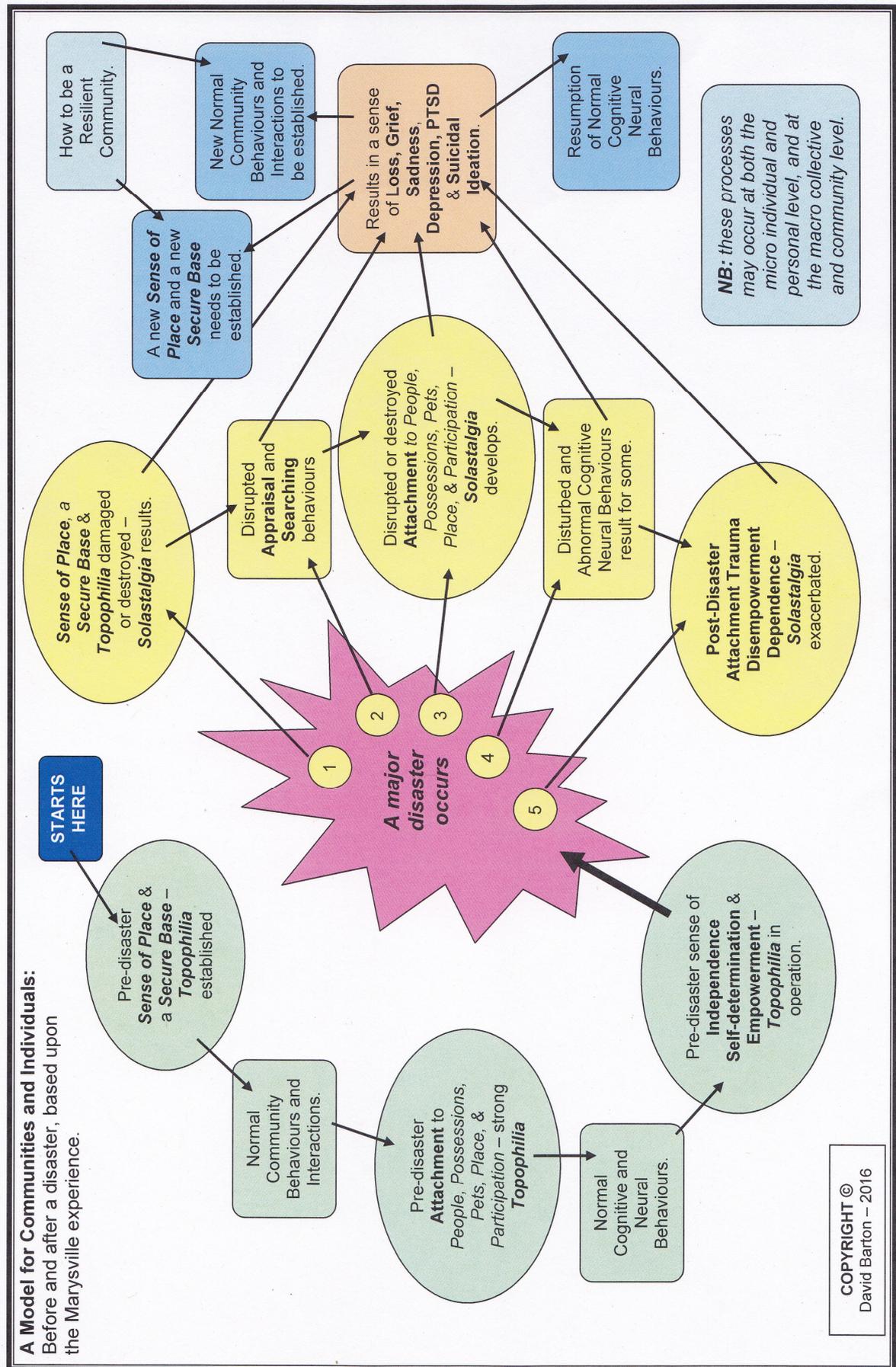
There is a little bit of the Humpty Dumpty<sup>226</sup> in recovery. It took 150 years to build Marysville to what it was; how best to put back together again? As a long-time (25+ years) professional and experienced youth worker, social worker, and then community development worker, I am well qualified to make comment about what I have observed of the local Marysville community development experience of recovery.

The Guidelines contained in the Commonwealth Government's Australian Emergency Manual Series (2003) *Community Development in Recovery from Disaster* are quite

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<sup>225</sup> That said, perhaps evidence of emergent Soliphilia can be found through some of the experiences of those living in the Temporary Village, as seen in Chapter Six on page 190.

<sup>226</sup> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, all the Kings horses and all the King's men, couldn't put Humpty together again.



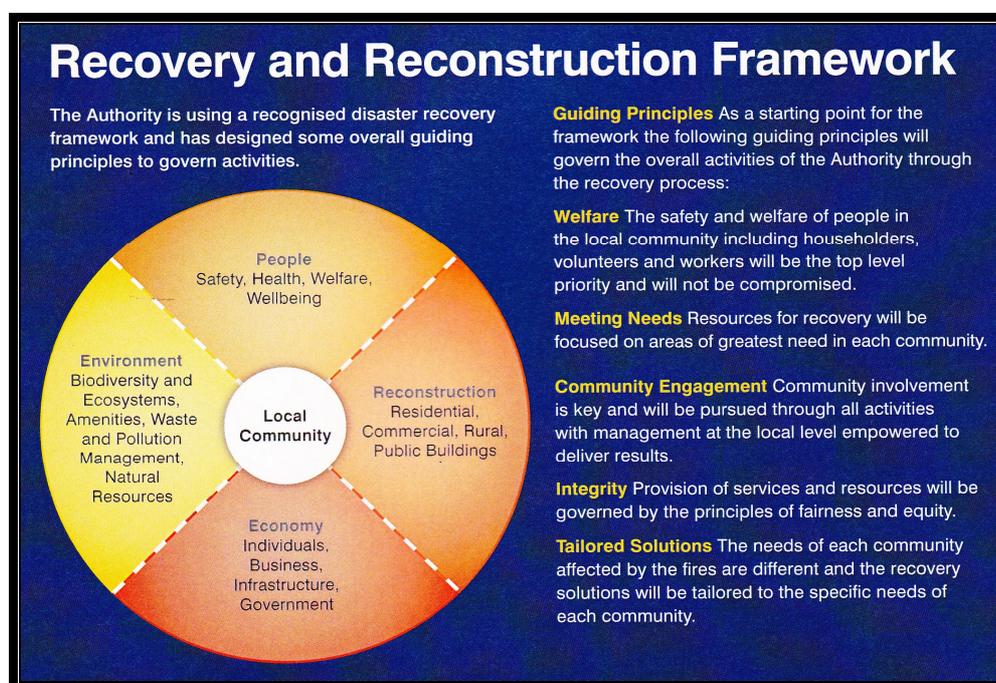
**Figure 7.7:** A Model for Communities and Individuals: Before and after a disaster, based upon the Marysville experience.

specific as to the role of community development principles in disaster recovery.<sup>227</sup> In part, the guidelines state:

The underlying basis of these Principles is a community development approach. Specifically, in the disaster recovery context this is defined as the empowerment of individuals and communities to manage their own recovery.

(Australian Emergency Manual Series, 2003: 2)

Immediately after the fires the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments created the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (VBRRA). The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) notes that: “VBRRA adopted a modified version of a New Zealand recovery framework that has the concept of community at its centre. The framework includes the same functional areas as the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*” (VBRC, 2010b: 334 & 335). The principles of community development were not only encapsulated in the Commonwealth Government’s *Australian Emergency Manual Series*, the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* model, and the VBRRA model, they were supposed to be central to it, as shown in the ‘Recovery and Reconstruction Framework’ (VBRRA, 2010: 3) in **Figure 7.8** below.



**Figure 7.8:** The Recovery and Reconstruction Framework as established by the Victorian Bushfires Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (VBRRA).<sup>228</sup>

<sup>227</sup> See **Appendix J** for the introductory principles and guidelines.

<sup>228</sup> **Source:** VBRRA (2010: 3).

Many of the guidelines I read in the documents such as the above VBRRRA model sound wonderful. However, as we have seen in this thesis, what was contained in those guidelines does not appear to be the experience of so many in the community who were trying to rebuild their lives. Community engagement and involvement is meant to be a key driver “pursued through all activities with management at the local level empowered to deliver results” and consequently “recovery solutions will be tailored to the specific needs of each community” (VBRRRA, 2010: 3).

Despite the perhaps best intentions by some in authority, clearly that is not what happened. The Victorian Government’s ‘Fire Recovery Unit’ (FRU) report *‘Lessons Learned by Community Recovery Committees of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires: Advice we offer to communities impacted by disaster’* (FRU, 2011b) notes that,

... communities should play a leadership role in recovery from disaster. Locally led recovery is crucial for communities and the people within them. Locally led recovery supports and enables decisions *about* the local community by people *within* the community and empowers community members in their own personal recovery process.

(FRU, 2011b: 7 – italics theirs)

Post-fire recovery needed to take a community development approach, and was required by government policy to do so, but it did not happen. The theory was all there, but it strikes no chord with reality – with what I and others actually experienced and observed. Rather than a ground-up approach, with facilitating help from above, recovery and rebuilding became a hierarchical top-down directive approach where the real needs and wishes of local people were all but ignored. It is telling that the FRU report also observes that the “lack of support for local and community based leadership was disappointing and frustrating” (2011b: 7)

Taylor and Goodman (2015) in quoting (in italics) respondents from their own research about the post-fire recovery in Kinglake, note that, “*Recovery is all about psycho-social approaches and is the domain of soft-skills ‘people people’ with relational and emotional skills and expertise [whereas] Reconstruction is a technical enterprise and focused on hard-skills physical expertise.*” They continue, “*There was too much emphasis on physical rebuilding and not (enough on) relationship*

*rebuilding and community rebuilding*” (p 44, italics theirs). This too has been the experience of Marysville.

Taylor and Goodman’s (2015) extensive research showed that “*VBRRRA processes had failed to achieve truly representative community participation in the development of the community recovery plan*” (p 48, italics theirs). Indeed, they also note that “Some LGA<sup>229</sup> officers did not believe that some of these matters were brought about as ‘unintended consequences’, but rather that the strategies were intentional, and intentionally divisive. *There was a lot of divide and conquer/wedge politics going on. VBRRRA’s ‘working together’ tag lines were empty*” (p 47, italics theirs). Again, many would say this was also Marysville’s experience.

In further quoting from their interviewees, Taylor and Goodman, (2015) note: “*Straight after fires (sic) – communities came together pretty well – then decisions started to split the community – even though decisions were made with the best of intentions. There was not enough attention to the implications of decisions. Mention was made of the flow-on effect of ‘command and control’ decision making. Decisions bring consequences. We have had so many decisions made on our behalf. There have been a lot of unintended consequences*” (p 113, italics theirs). They also note that “From the perspectives of some CRC<sup>230</sup> members, their experience of (non community based) decision makers was often a negative one. When intervening, *‘State and local governments [were] riding roughshod over our work and taking over our processes’*” (p 112, italics theirs). It is fairly clear that a centralised and hierarchical command and control model was being implemented, not the prescribed community development models as contained in so many extant policy documents.

Taylor and Goodman, (2015) concluded, “There was a desire expressed for people to be self-determining, yet in reality this didn’t happen. *As community members, we’re all equally disempowered...*” (p 113, italics theirs). Gunter<sup>231</sup> (2011) and Leadbeater<sup>232</sup> (2012) also conducted extensive post-fire research and came to similar

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<sup>229</sup> LGA: Local Government Authority.

<sup>230</sup> CRC: Community Recovery Committee.

<sup>231</sup> Lyn Gunter was the Mayor of the Shire of Murrindindi at the time of Black Saturday. She resigned in December, 2009, in frustration and protest over, *inter alia*, shire rates increases.

<sup>232</sup> Ann Leadbeater, OAM, has been a community development worker within the Shire of Murrindindi both before and since Black Saturday. (OAM: Order of Australia Medal.)

conclusions, ones that my research also confirms. A number of *ad-hoc* community groups were formed immediately after the fires representing the interests of local people. Regarding the authorities' response to such groups, Gunter (2011) says:

Instead of working with these semi-formal structures ... senior staff and some councillors were directly opposed and even hostile towards them, labelling the community group leaders as 'ring leaders' that needed to be kept busy or at bay of important decision-making.

(Gunter, 2011: 69)

Such attitudes became apparent from day one. Jans<sup>233</sup> (2009) echoes Gunter's findings, observing that individuals and fledgling community organisations were "treated as if they were an irritation" (p 3) by government authorities, also noting "the authorities reluctance, often amounting to refusal, to engage" (p 5). Jans further comments on the "the patronising approach that was taken when they finally did" (p 5) and this resulted in "leaving many exhausted and disillusioned" (p 3). In speaking of so many lost opportunities, Jans concludes "Post-disaster recovery in Australia must never be handled as ineptly as it has been in Victoria" (p 10). Whilst nominations were called by the Shire for representatives to be on the new Government-imposed Community Recovery Committees (CRC's) the final appointments were made by the Shire in conjunction with VBBRA and the Council's Section 86 Committee. In relation to this process, Gunter notes:

The establishment of CRC's was done in a strange way and not very transparent – it wasn't clear how many representatives were hand-picked by Council appointment and how many were truly elected on a qualification basis. This process didn't receive a good note from the community. Instead, it fortified the "Them and Us" dichotomy.

(Gunter, 2011: 70)

It is true that the Marysville community (in stark contrast to other bushfire-affected communities) had very little, if any, say in who was appointed to the Marysville CRC. From that point, things simply got worse, with Gunter again noting:

Whilst the charettes organized by a star architect to allow for community input and involvement in the design of the townships and facilities ... were very

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<sup>233</sup> Brigadier Nick Jans, PhD, is a leadership specialist and a resident of Marysville. On Black Saturday he successfully fought the fire alongside his wife Judy to save their home.

positively received by the community and produced a useful start, the way that VBRRRA decided on the design and location of key buildings was everything else than participatory. Key buildings, such as the Recovery Centre [*the RAC building*] in the middle of the township of Marysville and the Stage 2 multi-purpose centre [*the Marysville Community and Health Centre*] are made in a design that is completely opposite of what the community said they would like to see.

(Gunter, 2011: 71)

O'Neill (2014) notes, *inter alia*, that “the CRC implemented a wide range of proactive strategies designed to reach and engage with local residents as extensively as possible” (p 130). Unfortunately, it is clear that things were not as successful as O'Neill suggests. Many people (including myself) were excluded from the process. Indeed, O'Neill's outsider version of events shows just how much those in authority can misread and misunderstand what is actually happening. They see it through rose-coloured glasses and thereby get it so wrong. In her paper addressing the post-Black Saturday recovery of Strathewen, Leadbeater (2012) thoroughly discussed matters of community representation and participation. The issue was summed up by one of Leadbeater's interviewees in this way:

*It seemed to me that in some instances, agencies came in over the top and said well, that's all very well and good, you've got those community groups there, but this is what you are going to have...you are going to have a CRC and this is how it's going to be elected and we want these people on it and to some extent, ignored what was already happening ...*

(Leadbeater, 2012: 20. Italics hers.)

This is precisely what happened in Marysville. Perhaps in many cases those who had volunteered were deliberately excluded. The externally-driven steamroller of recovery had commenced its inexorable forwards movement; as it gathered pace the reaction of the community was not surprising, as another of Leadbeater's interviewees notes:

The peril to long-term recovery of government representatives 'trampling the existing stuff' and 'appointing' or imposing recovery committees in other communities without consultation was also considered: ... *you might be able to come in, you might be able to pick the right people, you might end up with exactly the right stuff, but if you didn't consult with all of those people who had some sort of leadership role and groups that were performing some sort of*

*function beforehand, and if they feel disenfranchised, then what you might do, is have the right people in the right place but a whole lot of other people undermining you because they are pissed off – and why do that?*

(Leadbeater, 2012: 22. Italics hers.)

The selective choosing of leadership representatives and the steam-rolling of agendas hardly contributes to community cohesion or a sense of cooperation, especially amongst distraught survivors. When one group of people hold the power and another group of people are disenfranchised, problems are inevitable.

What Leadbeater highlights is a well-established community development principle. Decisions made by outsiders should not be imposed or forced upon a community; they need to be able to come to their own decisions in their own time. Surely that principle is doubly true of a disaster-affected community. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in June, 2011, with the attempted forced abolition of the *Marysville and District Chamber of Commerce* (M&DCoC) so as to merge with the *Marysville Mystic Mountains Tourism* (MMT) association in favour of an amalgamated all-new organisation. This decision was clearly not something that the community wanted or was ready for. However, the idea (as contained in the Boston Consulting Group's 'Economic Recovery Strategy') led to a strong push from Government, through the Council's local Economic Leadership Group, to engage a firm of consultants (who were paid about \$25,000) to lead members of both groups through a process that would deliver the desired outcome of doing away with both M&DCoC and MMT, replacing them with a new organisation. Having been the Secretary of the M&DCoC during this time, I found this process to be deeply patronising. Mature and experienced members of the Marysville business community were led by the hand through a sequence with a clearly pre-determined outcome – that of abolishing the M&DCoC and MMT, both of which had been important pre-fire organisations, and remained so after the fire. After a series of ineffectual meetings whereby the consultants attempted to convince the members of the correctness of the consultants' views, the establishment of a new such organisation was put to a vote. It was narrowly defeated and the crestfallen consultants left town, never to be heard of again.

The corollary to this episode though is that in early 2014, the members of both associations came to their own decision that it would be in everyone's best interests

for both organisations to amalgamate and become one, which is what occurred in April, 2014, with the formation of the new *Marysville Triangle Business and Tourism Inc.* (MTBT). The community itself knew what it needed, but more importantly, knew when it was needed. That decision was not one to be made by outsiders. What had earlier been an attempt (by external agents) to force change upon the community may not have been such a bad idea in itself, but the timing was wrong because those who were attempting to force such an outcome did not understand the history, the needs or the timing of the community.<sup>234</sup> Whilst many in the community knew that the post-fire amalgamation of the organisations would eventually be necessary (because of the now much smaller business and population base) it was still too early in the loss, grief and bereavement process to be able to let those pre-fire organisations go.<sup>235</sup> Rejecting the attempted forced amalgamation was one small victory for the community, against many losses. When community members are not in control of their own destiny and are pushed aside, they are disempowered. As a result, instead of recovery being assisted – disillusionment and mental health issues may arise thereby contributing to ongoing Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, depression and solastalgia.

The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department has a view that disaster recovery should be community-led, as enshrined in its National Principles for Disaster Recovery (AIDR, 2011: 28). A snapshot view of their disaster recovery model is shown at **Figure 7.9** below as related to the concept of community development. The (electronic version) caption states that after relief and recovery, “as time progresses, ongoing community development work increases and supercedes immediate recovery efforts, until the level of ongoing community development work reaches the same level as before the disaster event” (p 34).

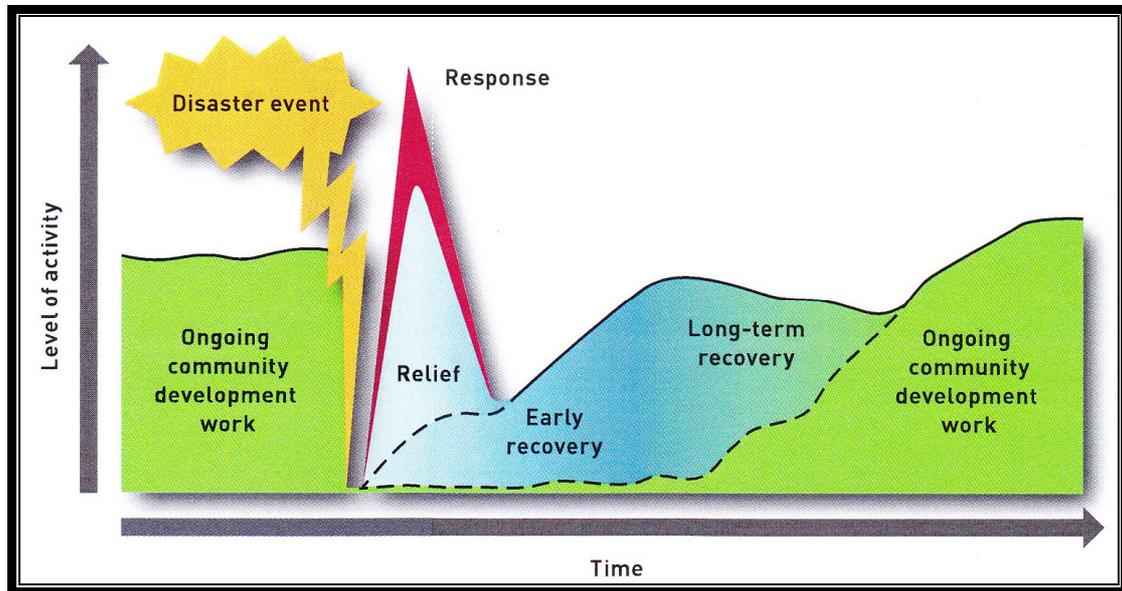
There are of course several assumptions in the graph, with the most problematic being the assumption that: a) there was any community development work occurring in the pre-disaster community in the first place, and b) that after the disaster, once the long-term recovery work has concluded, that any community development work continues.

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<sup>234</sup> And this was principally the case because, first, they were engaged by an outside agency to impose an agenda and an outcome upon the community, and secondly, they did not talk to the people (the community) concerned, so immediately created resentment.

<sup>235</sup> It is relevant to know that some members of both MMT and the M&DCoC were killed in the fires, including the M&DCoC President and Secretary. The preservation of both those organisations was perhaps also seen at the time as a mark of respect to those who had died, something the consultants failed to see or understand.

Certainly, as far as Marysville is concerned, there has been no community development work undertaken in the town for many years. Indeed, in 2017 the entire right-hand-side green section of **Figure 7.9** is missing.



**Figure 7.9:** The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience's model for disaster recovery and community development.<sup>236</sup>

As we have seen above, this model may be little more than wishful thinking. I would argue the recovery process in Marysville was misdirected and unsound from the beginning. It would appear that the authorities never understood the effects of broken attachments, of topophilia and a destroyed secure base, of the effects of severe loss and grief reactions, or the extent of early-onset disempowerment, disenfranchisement and depression, or of the innate human need for appraisal and searching behaviour and the occurrence of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, or the development of solastalgia. These are concepts completely unknown to most. Despite the great theories contained in so much of the literature, it would also appear that the authorities did not understand the needs of the community, or the community development approaches required to address those needs. In any event, it seems that within government and non-government organisations there were never sufficient staff available skilled in community development to cover the geographical extent of the disaster.<sup>237</sup> These combined failures meant the community's wishes were never really

<sup>236</sup> Source: AIDR, (2011: 34). <https://www.aidr.org.au/media/1488/handbook-2-community-recovery.pdf>

<sup>237</sup> Which of course gives rise to the question: why have a policy in place if it is unlikely there will ever be enough qualified and skilled staff available to effectively implement it?

heard, understood, explored or taken into account. What transpired after a short time was eventual community disillusionment, a lack of interest, and withdrawal from the process.<sup>238</sup> As we have seen, this is followed by having to accept the lack of any meaningfully inclusive process, and a stoic resignation to a new and oftentimes unwanted reality. As Ingham and Redshaw (2017) correctly note, "...we need to reconceptualise disaster ... recovery from something 'done' to the community, to something the community expects to be involved in and be a part of" (p 62). What this also amounted to for Marysville was many, many lost opportunities for the future. As Leadbeater so correctly concludes:

'Recovery' started badly is almost impossible to reclaim given its longer-term impacts on the structure, relationships and functioning of the community. Creating space and time for the community to come together and for the 'right' answers to emerge is an investment in meaningful, sustainable recovery.

(Leadbeater, 2012: 29)

In essence, disaster recovery is about power relationships. After a disaster, communities often struggle in a conflict over who should hold the power, and of who actually does. Perhaps, as some locals have opined, it's one of the Golden Rules that applies – 'He Who Has The Gold Makes The Rules'. Again as we have seen, those who control the money certainly dictate how it is allocated and spent. To deny communities that control can only result in disenfranchisement. We are told by authors such as Nixon and Hanna (2011), and O'Neill (2014) that the recovery has been a successful community-driven process. The question must then be asked – when the opportunity was there to make things so much better for the community, how did we in fact end up with what we clearly said we didn't want?<sup>239</sup> And perhaps, as a result, the social and economic position of Marysville remains little better than it was before the fires. The FRU (2011a) report '*Lessons Learned by Community Recovery Committees of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires: Advice for Government*' is a valuable document and notes:

People across all spheres of government need training in community development principles. The lack of understanding in this area by many people

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<sup>238</sup> With some survivors actually making their decision to leave the district and relocate somewhere else as a result.

<sup>239</sup> Is this again simply a case of the old adage that: 'A camel is a horse designed by a committee'. Marysville seems to have many camels.

in various government spheres in 2009 has had obvious and lasting impact on our communities.

(FRU, 2011a: 5)

While the above report points out the many shortcomings of the response and recovery process, it stops short of providing ways in which the many issues raised in it can be dealt with. We can only hope that government has acknowledged these critical issues and valid concerns and is actively working to address them for future disasters.

Over time, the major shortcomings and long-term effects of the recovery process become more starkly evident. As noted in Chapter Six (p 202), in July 2016 the State Government allocated funds the refurbishment of the Marysville Visitor Information Centre, as again shown in **Figure 7.10** below:



**Figure 7.10:** The newly constructed Marysville Rebuilding Advisory Centre, officially opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 2010. It later became the Marysville Visitor Information Centre and is now, some seven years later, to be internally stripped and refurbished.<sup>240</sup>

The Government was told the building was inappropriate and impractical when the design and floor plans were first revealed back in 2009 before it was even built, but they refused to listen. Perhaps now, with the allocation of the new funds for refurbishment, the hollow promise of ex-Premier Brumby as footnoted in Chapter Six (p 202) may at least be partially fulfilled. Sadly, the then petition organiser, Suzanne

<sup>240</sup> Source: <http://www.bamford-architects.com/marysville/>

Prien, did not live to see the refurbishment, having died of cancer in 2016, just short of her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>241</sup>

## **Summary**

The problem here is that the theory of community development in disaster recovery already exists in quite some detail; the difficulty comes in its application. Disaster recovery organisations know what they should be doing – it is already in the manuals. The problem then becomes multi-faceted because of so many complicating factors. First, they have difficulty in actually carrying out the tasks, perhaps because they do not have the staff numbers with the necessary qualifications, experience and personal skills to do so; secondly, they have difficulty managing the competing political, media, and corporate agendas and interference, and thirdly, they have difficulty in managing the local population of survivors, who themselves are struggling to come to terms with what has just happened to them, let alone think about their longer term recovery. These issues must be realistically addressed so the same mistakes do not occur next time – and there will always be a next time.

## **Findings**

This project began by exploring Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process. In particular, I asked about the experiences of Marysville residents in the aftermath of the fire, especially in relation to what we can understand about disaster recovery. In answer to these questions, I note the following main findings which can be summarised in five points:

1. That disaster-related loss and grief experiences associated with the secure base of attachment behaviour specifically affects deep attachment-based relationships with People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation (the five Ps).
2. That post-disaster, delayed or interrupted attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour can, for some, result in a phenomenon I have named 'Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma'.

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<sup>241</sup> As a good friend of Suzanne's I am aware that it was arguably the stress of her many negative post-fire experiences that contributed to her early illness and untimely death.

3. That individual and community disempowerment and disenfranchisement can exacerbate Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and may result in further negative mental health and wellbeing outcomes for some, including anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
4. That Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, disempowerment, disenfranchisement and depression may result in both individual and collective solastalgia.
5. That Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, disempowerment, disenfranchisement, depression and solastalgia are likely to result in delayed recovery and less than satisfactory individual and community outcomes.<sup>242</sup>

This research project has found beyond doubt that people are attached (in both a Bowlby and a topophilic sense) to people, to possessions, to pets (including other animals), to place (including their home) and to participation in their community, environment, and way of life. Some of these things may appear self-evident; however, this research has confirmed them. The five Ps of attachment relate to people having created a topophilic secure base for themselves and their family. The sense of loss and grief that occurs when their secure base is destroyed can be severe. Such grief is initially experienced through normal attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour. If this behaviour is thwarted then personal distress is likely which may result in what I have termed Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. This phenomenon has to date not been previously recognised or reported.

People's attachments suffer with the loss of family members, friends, possessions, pets, place and participation in their community and way of life. The usual symptoms of loss and grief<sup>243</sup> are an unavoidable and natural human response, yet the effect varies widely with each individual, and may also be related to their attachment type.<sup>244</sup> The duration and persistence of various loss and grief responses varies with

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<sup>242</sup> See Norris, et al., 2002, and Winkworth, 2007, in Chapter Two, pp 22-23.

<sup>243</sup> Symptoms of loss and grief include, but are not limited to: crying, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, yearning, relief, numbness, disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sleep and appetite disturbance, weight loss or gain, absent-mindedness, social withdrawal, substance abuse, bad dreams, avoidance, searching, sighing, suicidal ideation, restlessness and hyperactivity (Worden, 2010: pp 17-30).

<sup>244</sup> There are four defined Attachment Types broadly known as Secure, Avoidant, Ambivalent and Disorganised (Coste, 2017; Levine & Heller, 2010; O'Connor & Elklit, 2008). Whilst relevant to this research, detailed investigation and discussion of these types in relation to disaster recovery is beyond the scope of this thesis.

each individual; however, we have seen that such responses can be exacerbated by the post-disaster actions of response and recovery agencies. In both the response and recovery phases of disaster, authorities need to recognise and accommodate the very real experiences of attachment, topophilia, loss and grief, and the likelihood of emerging PDAT and solastalgia, taking whatever steps necessary to avoid their creation or exacerbation. The types of interventions by government statutory authorities and other NGO's, combined with people's individual reactions and decisions, can greatly affect their short-term responses to the disaster and their long-term recovery.

There is a sense of disempowerment, disenfranchisement, disorientation, dependence and loss of control that may be exacerbated by disaster response and recovery agencies, especially with issues such as a lock-out or mass clean-up. A continuing sense of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and loss of control may endure into the recovery and rebuilding phase. People may begin to become impervious to disappointment and so build around them a personal protective shell which may manifest as depression, dissociation, disengagement and withdrawal. Solastalgia may also become pervasive across a community, especially if disempowerment and disenfranchisement continues. A sense of collective sadness, manifesting as continuing depression for some, may be a result of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and solastalgia. Some people may tend to give up and retreat into themselves, their own affairs, and their own small (yet isolated) support groups. Some people can remain traumatised for quite some time (as we are still seeing some eight years later). However, the early implementation of honest and cooperative community development approaches with a real focus on community building may obviate much of the above.

When it comes to disaster response and recovery, the Latin words "*festina lente*" are appropriate. 'Hasten slowly',<sup>245</sup> or its more contemporary incarnation, 'more haste, less speed' would seem to be the best way to address disaster recovery when dealing with survivors. In other words, take care of the essentials first, but act on other non-essentials later with the full cooperation of the community.

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<sup>245</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festina\\_lente](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festina_lente)

## Chapter Summary

Australia is set in the context of being one of the world's most fire-prone locations and as such has a long history of bushfire. Disasters will inevitably have a large effect upon individuals, community and society. As the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (2010c) observed, more needs to be understood in relation to the human impact of (bushfire) disasters (p 394ff.), and that is the goal of this research. The need for sense-making, or meaning-making is all important to interpreting and understanding what has occurred. As an autoethnographer, I have lived through this story along with all those I have interviewed. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) have noted, I too have found that,

... as witnesses, autoethnographers not only work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances.

(Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011: para. 27)

That has certainly happened through this research project, as expressed to me by the many people who have participated in it. I have felt and validated their pain, and they mine, yet there is more to it than that. As Cyrulnik (2009) notes:

The human memory is so constructed that an event that is devoid of meaning leaves no trace. ... Images make no sense if they cannot be situated and turned into narrative. ... It is the emotion we feel at the time that explains why certain events are transformed into memories whilst others leave no trace.

(Cyrulnik, 2009: 32 and 35)

In hearing the pain of others I have captured their emotions and turned them into narrative. I have examined and interpreted those narratives, deriving meaning from them, and so arrived at the essence of this research. When a disaster occurs, understand what is happening to the people involved; do everything to not make things worse than they already are – do no harm. This is a human ethical and moral duty – to look after each other and to try and ameliorate each others pain. In addition, this will save many other problems later on. Perhaps recovery is also encapsulated in another Golden Rule: 'Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You'. It is about respect for the rights and needs of others; it is about not insisting upon and

forcing an external agenda. It is about *festina lente* – hasten slowly; be considerate, be gentle, be kind. Allow others to recover and rebuild, both individually and as a community, at a pace that suits their needs.

In September 2012, Jack and I left Gruyere and returned to Marysville. My marriage was over. I wanted to return to the people and place where I felt known and appreciated, and where I could continue my research through direct involvement with the community. I lived on-site for a while at the old Temporary Village (at that time being transformed into Camp Marysville), and my research gathered pace. Nevertheless, these remained very dark years for me personally, yet I persisted with the work, not giving up because of a dogged determination to find the answers I sought. Later I moved to Buxton (for cheaper rent) and then back to Marysville again, finally purchasing some land outside of Marysville where I now live.

As this work draws to a close, I'm very pleased that my original concerns and questions that began in the days soon after Black Saturday have now finally been addressed and answered.

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## Chapter Eight: *Conclusions – what can we do now?*



**Figure 8.1:** “What you need to understand is that you can’t understand unless you have been through the fire.”<sup>246</sup>

This project began as a personal exploration into issues of attachment, loss and grief after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Marysville. However, it became so much more than that. It became an enlightening discovery, and at times a painful one, as I reflected upon all the losses that we as individuals and as a community have suffered. We are reminded of those losses every day when we walk outside and see what has become of our town and its physical surroundings.

Yet by contrast, working on this PhD project was the one thing that actually kept me going during all of what happened to me throughout the dark years from 2009 to late 2015. If I hadn’t had this project to complete I might have simply sunk into a pit of

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<sup>246</sup> As quoted from an interview with Jenny Dovaston. **Meme sourced from:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/Science.Buddhism/photos/a.295013710528482.85542.123701504326371/1353462268016949/?type=3&theater>

depression and despair. Yet with the help of a few good people and, eventually, with some good counselling as well, I've made it. Now, over eight years later in 2017, I actually feel that I can at last begin to move forward and recommence my life from when it stalled on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009,

What I am most pleased about with this project is that it has caused me to explore and contemplate ideas I had never before considered, and could not have seen to be outcomes of this research. I am pleased that what I have learnt along this journey will make a strong contribution towards a wider understanding of what happens during recovery after a major disaster, and here's why ...

We cannot expect to solve problems and do better next time if we fail to recognise what went wrong in the first place. Doing better next time can only be achieved by an honest understanding of why recovery went badly, and a genuine commitment to develop remedies to fix it.

Formally, this thesis began with the research question, 'How did survivors of the Marysville Black Saturday bushfire experience attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process?' That question is answered in Chapters Four and Five. Two sub-questions were asked, the first being, 'What were the experiences of Marysville residents in the aftermath of the fire; particularly regarding their sense of attachment, loss and grief?' That question is answered in Chapters Five and Six. The second sub-question was, 'What can we understand about attachment, loss and grief in disaster recovery from their experiences?' And that question is answered in Chapters Seven and Eight.

In answering the research questions the thesis utilised an underlying phenomenological epistemology overlaid with an autoethnographic ontological discourse. During the course of the research, I told my story in autoethnography, and the stories of others through interviews. I explored both within myself and with others what it was about attachment, grief, loss, topophilia and solastalgia in post-Black Saturday Marysville that affected my and their response and recovery. Through Chapters Four, Five and Six I have described how I and many others in the community were adversely affected and further traumatised by the response and

recovery process, thereby bringing about the second disaster. Through examining these stories I then considered to what extent attachment theory is specifically important in understanding the experiences of disaster survivors. This led to an exploration of how the concepts of topophilia and solastalgia can provide sense and meaning in understanding the recovery and wellbeing of disaster survivors. In time, this then led to my discovery of the importance of early appraisal and searching behaviour within the attachment milieu, which ultimately led to the discovery of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma – a major breakthrough.

The thesis findings have important implications internationally regarding future approaches to immediate post-disaster response and about what can be done to improve future short- and long-term disaster recovery. What I have revealed ought to have the potential to fundamentally change the way that disaster response and recovery is managed into the future. The present command and control focus upon responding essentially to physical and material assets, and the preoccupation with risk management and health and safety issues, have proved to cause emotional and psychological harm to disaster survivors. Authorities now need to realise that people and communities must be able to fully participate in both the disaster response, and in their own recovery from the very outset, assuming they wish to, and that means as soon as the immediate danger and threat has passed. If this involvement does not occur, it is likely that Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma will be an outcome, which may for some then develop into longer-term mental health issues, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with all their concomitant costs to the community.

As we saw in Chapter Seven, the main findings of this research can be summarised in five succinct points, and they are repeated here:

1. That disaster-related loss and grief experiences associated with the secure base of attachment behaviour specifically affects deep attachment-based relationships with People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation (the five Ps).
2. That post-disaster, delayed or interrupted attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour can, for some, result in a phenomenon I have named 'Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma'.
3. That individual and community disempowerment and disenfranchisement can exacerbate Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and may result in further negative

mental health and wellbeing outcomes for some, including anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

4. That Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, disempowerment, disenfranchisement and depression may result in both individual and collective solastalgia.
5. That Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, disempowerment, disenfranchisement, depression and solastalgia are likely to result in delayed recovery and less than satisfactory individual and community outcomes.

This research has shown that Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT) can emerge within hours of a disaster, and will almost certainly develop for many within the first few days depending upon individual circumstances. If not addressed, PDAT will intensify during the ensuing weeks, and for some its effects may last for months or perhaps even years, as we have seen with some Marysville bushfire survivors.

As we have also seen earlier in the thesis, PDAT occurs from the delay in, or prevention of, appraisal and searching behaviour, thereby denying people access to vital information about the status of their secure base and attachment figures (both animate and inanimate). We have seen that delayed or denied appraisal and searching behaviour prevents the initiation and processing of normal human grief-related responses. It appears that the prevention of appraisal and searching behaviour will for many provoke a traumatic response of anxiety, frustration, stress and possibly anger. These are normal and natural responses to be expected from experiences of blocked attachment-related traumatic loss and grief.

## **Answers to the Research Questions**

What started out as an investigation into people's individual Black Saturday experiences resulted in an understanding of the condition of the whole community. Attachment theory has been shown to play an important part when considering individual survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief and the effect of such radical change to one's home environment and secure base.

The one key finding to come out of this research is that because of the failure of authorities to recognise and take into account psycho-social factors such as the strong attachment-related behaviour connected to the five Ps, the authorities do not allow

direct involvement of disaster survivors in early response and recovery (appraisal and searching) efforts. This lack of involvement may then bring about Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and disempowerment. Such further trauma and disempowerment is likely to exacerbate normal human attachment-related loss and grief responses, thereby complicating short- and long-term individual and collective recovery. It may also precipitate solastalgia which can result in both individual and collective long-term sadness, depression and delayed recovery.

The outcomes of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, disempowerment and solastalgia are likely to include ongoing mental health issues (such as chronic sadness, anxiety and depression), delays and difficulty in reconstructing one's personal life, relationship difficulties, ongoing dissatisfaction with rebuilding outcomes, fragmentation of communities, the waste of precious and scarce resources, and a prolonged process of recovery. The research has shown there are many interconnected elements that need to be understood, including the way issues of attachment, topophilia and solastalgia are deeply rooted to issues of empowerment, disempowerment, and disenfranchisement, leading to numerous implications for understanding disaster response and recovery in the future. The challenges and issues that have been revealed through the survivors' experiences are worthy of acknowledgement and should be taken seriously by governments, policy makers, emergency services agencies and non-government organisations specialising in disaster recovery.

It would appear that the current model of project-based funding of recovery, with its focus on the replacement of physical assets to the detriment of social infrastructure, is problematic and contributes to solastalgia. As I have noted, this individual and collective loss of attachment and secure base is often followed by sadness, anxiety, isolation and depression for those in the recovering community. At this time, it would appear that little of the authorities' disaster recovery attention is directed towards these matters. To ignore such fundamentals means a prolonged recovery time, increased recovery costs, and moribund communities.

As noted in Chapter Seven, the research in this thesis has been filtered into two main themes, with many examples or illustrations of those themes, as summarised below.

## **Theme One: The Importance of Attachment, Topophilia and Solastalgia to Disaster Management**

From the beginning I thought that attachment theory would prove to be the main focus of this research and its outcomes. However, whilst attachment theory and its cousin topophilia are very real and important parts of disaster response and recovery, I discovered that they feed into solastalgia which itself becomes a major barrier to successful disaster recovery.

Attachment to People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation provides a personal secure base from which to live. Disasters greatly disturb or destroy this secure base. Recovery is a complex process that may well be damaged and prolonged if survivors are not involved in a meaningful way immediately after the disaster passes. Should such involvement be circumvented then Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, sadness, anxiety, isolation, depression, solastalgia and perhaps Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are likely results. A simplified pre-, mid- and post-disaster formula might look something like this:

Pre-disaster:– attachment *plus* topophilia = secure base

Mid-disaster:– attachment *minus* appraisal = PDAT

Post-disaster:– recovery *minus* involvement = solastalgia

Through a lack of meaningful involvement in the response and recovery process (ie: the sidelining of survivors) individual and collective disempowerment and disenfranchisement occur, and this becomes a second disaster. As we have noted earlier, the Black Saturday bushfire was the first disaster; the recovery became the second disaster. What must be avoided at all costs is turning the recovery process itself into yet another disaster for individuals and the community.

### **Illustrations – Personal**

There have been many illustrations throughout the thesis of the effects of disrupted attachment and topophilia contributing to Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma, sadness, isolation, depression and solastalgia. Some of them are recapped as follows: the pre-

fire lack of warnings; the post-fire lock out; the arbitrary removal of motor vehicles; the distressing bus tour through Marysville; the rapid clean-up and resultant loss of property rights; the lack of care and attention to the loss of possessions and pets; the lack of attention to the protection of private land resulting in numerous post-fire trespassing and thefts. Note that almost all of the above examples illustrate the denial of the opportunity for appraisal and searching behaviour to occur, hence the onset of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma for many.

Theme One focuses on the individual and the personal. It is important because the illustrations demonstrate how already badly damaged and fragile post-disaster attachments and topophilic behaviour, when further undermined, results in extended individual and collective recovery times. This contributes to protracted personal anxiety and increased costs to the public purse through additional funds required for recovery and counselling resources. Extended recovery times also contribute to lost productivity from survivors.

## **Theme Two: The Importance of Individual and Community Disempowerment and Disenfranchisement to Disaster Management**

As we saw in Chapter Two (pp. 34-49) and Chapter Seven, (pp. 231-236) attachment behaviour and topophilia play a positive and important role in the establishment of many people's pre-disaster attachment to place. However, inappropriate post-disaster recovery can promote the onset of solastalgia, having a negative effect, overriding such accrued positive benefits. Further, individual and community disempowerment and disenfranchisement by government and other external authorities can also make individual and community recovery more difficult.

We have seen that the disempowerment of both individuals and the community began even before the fire hit Marysville, with fatal consequences. The complete lack of any warning to the townspeople already created a sense of having been neglected, forgotten and deserted. Immediately post-disaster, this research shows that the community was further disempowered and disenfranchised, denying many people access to not only their own properties, to loved ones, and to community support, but

also to important aspects of the disaster response and to Marysville's longer-term recovery and rebuilding process.

It remains problematic that so many of the post-fire 'community consultations' either did not deliver a result at all, or delivered results with which individuals and the community remain generally dissatisfied. It remains of concern that some authorities simply assumed they knew what was best for a post-disaster community, rather than working closely with the community to establish needs and delivering on that instead. In addition, sadly, whilst the survivors were preoccupied with their own immediate needs they were often unable to focus on or participate in the longer-term recovery of their community. Much of the foregoing could have been obviated by the application of, and strict adherence to, already well-known principles of community development practice. Unfortunately, in hindsight, the Marysville community simply got what it was given, in many ways too soon, and certainly without enough long-term thought or community empowerment to be able to manage the outcomes. Above all, the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of the Marysville and Triangle community can be referred to as simply a litany of missed opportunities.

### **Illustrations – Collective**

Throughout this thesis there have been many illustrations of the effects of disempowerment and disenfranchisement also contributing to anxiety, sadness, isolation, depression and solastalgia. Some of them are recapped as follows: the community consultations that in many instances came to nothing; the rebuilding of public buildings where community input was minimised and external (architect and consultant) input was maximised; the lack of consultation and complex politics surrounding the construction of the Rebuilding Advisory Centre (the now Visitor Information Centre); the Community and Health Centre; the police station; the Men's Shed; the Vibe Hotel development and the indoor swimming pool demolition.

Theme Two involves the collective and community level. It is important because, as with the issues of attachment and topophilia, disempowerment and disenfranchisement then create a collective sense of anxiety, sadness, isolation and depression resulting in solastalgia which hangs like a pall over the town, felt by both locals and visitors alike. Again, this results in extended individual and collective

recovery times, costing the public purse additional expense in recovery and counselling resources, contributing to lost productivity from survivors and a slower redevelopment time for the town itself.

To conclude, recent conversations with some local Marysville people lead me to the view that the post-fire disempowerment and disenfranchisement of many people mean they continue to suffer with sadness and in some cases, continuing isolation, depression and mental health issues as a part of what I would define as the persistent effects of solastalgia.

### **Thesis Benefits – Significance and Contribution to Knowledge**

Because of my dual insider-outsider placement within the research project my contribution to knowledge in the area of bushfire recovery is unusual. Further, my background as both an academic and a community development worker, when combined with my insider-outsider perspective, gave me much greater insight and understanding of what has happened within the Marysville community and the ability to communicate that to others.

The research is significant because it has for the first time connected deeply ingrained attachment-related appraisal and searching behaviour specifically to disaster response and recovery, and thereby described and named the phenomenon of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma. In addition, the research has connected the relatively recent concept of solastalgia to the post-disaster Marysville context. Both Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and solastalgia fit within the wider matrix of already well-understood experiences of post-disaster disempowerment and disenfranchisement, which were re-affirmed by this research as also having occurred in post-disaster Marysville.

The research had a number of other important findings. Many people were emotionally and psychologically damaged by the immediate response of the authorities to the disaster, especially in relation to the lock-out period, and that damage continues to this day. However, despite the post-disaster loss of over 60% of the town's population, many people remain firmly attached to Marysville and have a strengthened secure base and sense of place as a result of all they have experienced.

More importantly though, the research shows that people are suffering from the effects of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and solastalgia (experienced as sadness, isolation and depression), yet many are for the most part unaware of it. In addition, the effects of disempowerment and disenfranchisement that individuals and the community experienced during the recovery and rebuilding phase has compounded the sense of solastalgia (experienced as anxiety, depression and PTSD). Some within the Marysville community are of the view that sadness, isolation, anxiety, depression and PTSD are more widespread than is recognised, yet this remains unconfirmed. Finally, two elements I found surprising in the research interviews were that, 1) while important, people are not as attached to their possessions as I would have thought, and 2) people are much more attached to their pets and animals than I expected.

The benefits of the new knowledge arising from the research are that individuals, communities, politicians, media, governmental authorities, and non-government organisations will be better placed to respond in a more appropriate and effective manner after disasters in the future. I hope the mistakes of the past will not be repeated and effective community development practices will be put in place. To that end I make a number of recommendations later in this chapter.

## **Thesis Strengths**

The strength of this project is in two parts. First, it is a cathartic story, telling of the events of Black Saturday in which I was deeply involved and affected, along with many others in my community. Standing alone, this facet of the project has value. Secondly, it is detailed in-depth research that contributes to knowledge in the cultural, social and psycho-social arena. As a phenomenological and autobiographic exercise, the research has been very successful. To my knowledge, no one else in a position such as mine has undertaken such a study. I have lived through what I have researched. I have been both insider and outsider.

Others have written at length about the disempowerment of post-disaster bushfire communities, albeit only recently (eg: Donovan, 2013c; Gunter, 2011; Leadbeater, 2012). My research in that area is therefore not new, yet adds to and confirms their findings and, in the context of post-disaster Marysville, has added to that body of knowledge. In addition, whilst the concept of solastalgia is recent and in its infancy,

my research has confirmed its existence as an explanation for what has been observed in post-disaster Marysville. Further, what is completely new are my observations and findings regarding post-disaster attachment behaviour concerning the human need (indeed, requirement) for grief-related appraisal and searching activity, and what I have now identified as Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma (PDAT). This phenomenon has not previously been identified, reported or recorded, and, I believe, has come about purely because of my unique position as an insider researcher.

The study therefore has many strengths, the first of which is my insider personal experience and knowledge. Being a Marysville resident who lived through the Black Saturday holocaust, and of having participated in the recovery since, I was easily accepted as a researcher by the local community. Further, through my personal connection and relationships with many of those I interviewed, I became privy to information and knowledge that other researchers would be most unlikely to access. In other words, people shared deeply with me thoughts and experiences they readily admitted they were unlikely to share with others. I believe this contributes a high degree of genuineness to my findings.

The in-depth research interviews were flexible, open-ended and wide-ranging, so covered many elements of people's experiences, and because of both my own knowledge and experience of Black Saturday, and of the people I interviewed, there was no possibility that people only told me what I wanted to hear. In addition, I have often had to question if there are any other explanations that would better account for the post-fire response and recovery that I have observed and recorded other than the two themes as described in Chapter Seven. After almost seven years of intense reading, research, consideration and discussion I am of the view that what I have discovered and proposed provides the best explanation for what has been observed and experienced by Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors. It stands the test of deep scrutiny of the available evidence.

These new evidence-based research discoveries and conclusions have clear implications for future disaster management response and recovery that can now be the subject of follow-up research and policy development. In addition, the thesis does have a degree of generalisability in that we have seen in the literature that other local,

national and international fire-affected areas have raised the same or similar issues that have often until now gone without explanation.

## **Thesis Limitations**

An event such as Black Saturday has so many facets that it becomes enormous and unmanageable as one entity. It is an event that can only be broken down into smaller component parts, as one piece of research cannot possibly cover every aspect of the whole complex phenomenon. That is the first limitation, complexity; the very size and extent of the Black Saturday catastrophe, and therefore of this undertaking.

Added to the sheer size and complexity of the task, there was also the delicate interplay between the subjective autoethnographic and the objective analytical. As a PhD project the thesis could not simply be a purely evocative autoethnographic piece. On its own, given the subject matter, that would have worked well, but not for the rigorous purposes of a PhD. Finding the right balance between the autoethnographic and the analytical was always a challenge, and that too is a limitation.

The thesis was also limited by being constrained within a set timeframe. The research was not open-ended, yet the individual and collective recovery of Marysville is a dynamic process which continues daily. Hence, the thesis can only be a snapshot of a small segment along the continuum of recovery and growth. In addition, being a lone investigator with limited time and resources and no other assistance implicitly means less coverage. Further, being a participant observer (as discussed in Chapter Three) had both positive and negative elements in that I was already known and so had ready access to the community. However, some people did not necessarily respond to me as a truly objective observer, although most did.

The number, type and choice of people interviewed proved a limitation, particularly regarding the diminished input from government officials, as many were no longer employed by the time the interviews commenced. The depth and breadth of the interviews also proved a limitation. The interviews, some of which went for many hours spread over a number of days, provided so much rich information that it became impossible to process it all, certainly in any detail, and so much of it slipped by without sufficient analysis. The excess of information bordered on being

unmanageable,<sup>247</sup> yet there were more interviews that could have been done, and still more people who wanted to be interviewed. It really became a case of too much information.

The research led me into other areas of important discovery, particularly that of the influence of neuroscience and cognitive behaviour. The bio-chemistry of attachment behaviour, and of attachment trauma in particular, is a relatively new field, yet over time will contribute much more towards our understanding of these human behaviours. The area of neuroscientific endeavour is of vital importance in understanding post-disaster human behaviour and issues of trauma, attachment, loss and grief. Unfortunately, this thesis can give it only passing mention.

Lastly, the thesis occurs within a specific context, within a small group of people, using a specific methodology. None of these elements lend themselves towards generalisability, so claims regarding any wider application beyond the context of the research must for now be limited. Only further research into the matters raised in this thesis will be able to confirm any broader generalisability.

## **Further Research**

The thesis has covered a lot of ground, yet there remains so much more to explore and answer. Now that Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma has been identified, more research is required to develop and consolidate this concept as a genuine phenomenon. I am confident that it will be confirmed.

Within the thesis lie many other topics awaiting their turn for further examination and, although they cannot be explored in any detail here, amongst them are included:

- 1) Exploration of the neuroscience of bushfire survival, resilience and recovery;
- 2) Exploration of the neuroscience behind attachment, topophilia, solastalgia and Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma;
- 3) Exploration of how loss, grief, sadness, isolation, depression and suicidal ideation can be better managed from a neuroscience perspective;

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<sup>247</sup> Note that I have over 1,200 pages of interview transcripts and notes contained amongst the 24,000+ separate documents within the PhD folders on my computer.

- 4) Exploration of how various attachment types and styles will affect different people in their response to a trauma and disaster;<sup>248</sup>
- 5) Exploration and establishment of diagnostic criteria to firmly establish the occurrence of Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma;
- 6) Exploration of how post-disaster loss, grief, sadness, isolation, depression and suicidal ideation can be better managed via a better understanding of attachment behaviour, Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and solastalgia;
- 7) The implications of the foregoing for post-disaster counselling and psychological practice;
- 8) Exploration of improved methods of immediate post-disaster response (within the first four to six weeks) to incorporate the attachment needs of those immediately affected;
- 9) Exploration of how to incorporate those immediately affected by a disaster into meaningful and cathartic post-disaster response, recovery and rebuilding processes.
- 10) Exploration of how better community development approaches can improve individual and community post-disaster recovery outcomes;
- 11) Exploration of the short, medium and long-term health effects of disaster trauma upon discrete populations, especially concerning any connection between stress and the onset of cancer.

### **Research and the VBRC, the BNHCRC and the ‘Beyond Bushfires’ Project**

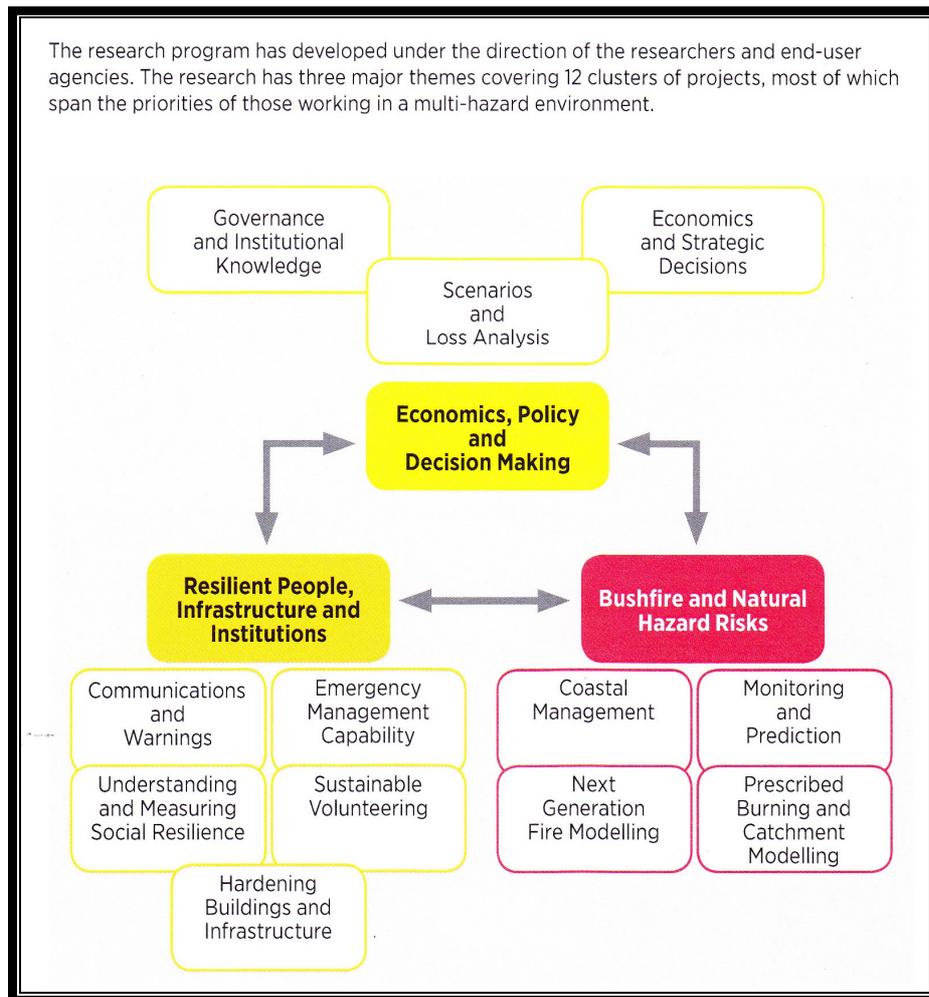
One area of further research though deserves more detailed mention. I refer to Chapter One where during the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC), Professor Pyne noted that the “Cultural/Social area of bushfire research is ‘somewhat neglected’” (VBRC, 2010c: 394). The Royal Commissioners agreed. Pyne further noted that “internationally, ‘there are too few researchers, and their study too narrow and exclusive’” (VBRC, 2010c: 395). He suggested that “urgent priority should be given to the social sciences” (VBRC, 2010c: 395).

Professor Adams was also quoted at the VBRC, noting that “the cultural heading is the most difficult and challenging and needs a ‘long view’” (VBRC, 2010b: 395).

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<sup>248</sup> See the work that Mikulincer, Florian and Weller, (1993), O’Connor and Elkit (2008), and Parkes (2009) have produced in this area.

This is true. Undertaking a project of this nature is a difficult and sensitive task which nevertheless has the potential to reap rich rewards and to make an important contribution to knowledge, as this thesis has done. However, as shown in **Figure 8.2** below, the Research Clusters as listed on the Australian Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre's (BNHCRC) website as at 6/2/2017 would appear to indicate that there is still not one single research project that addresses any cultural-social or psycho-social element of disaster response and recovery.<sup>249</sup>



**Figure 8.2:** Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC) research clusters and projects, August, 2016.<sup>250</sup>

I believe this clearly points to the need for agencies such as the Federal and State Departments of Health and Human Services, the Red Cross, Oxfam, and other such welfare agencies to become members and “end-users”<sup>251</sup> of research organisations

<sup>249</sup> Source: [http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/1608\\_projects\\_final2\\_0.pdf](http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/1608_projects_final2_0.pdf)

<sup>250</sup> Source: [http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/1608\\_projects\\_final2\\_0.pdf](http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/1608_projects_final2_0.pdf) Page 5.

<sup>251</sup> See <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/about/end-users>

such as the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre so that such cultural-social and psycho-social research can be sponsored and undertaken. I am also of the view that others with a research background who have personally experienced major disasters should be encouraged, and perhaps even sponsored, to embark upon researching and telling their unique story, and that of their community. This is how we really learn about disaster recovery – from the people who have lived through it. That said, brief mention should also be made of Melbourne University’s ‘Beyond Bushfires’ project, conducted from 2011 to 2016, surveying and interviewing over 1,000 Black Saturday bushfire-affected people.<sup>252</sup> This long-term study produced important and worthwhile results (see Gibbs, Bryant, Harms, Forbes, Block, Gallagher, Ireton, Richardson, Pattison, MacDougall, Lusher, Baker, Kellett, Pirrone, Molyneaux, Kosta, Brady, Lok, Van Kessell, and Waters, 2016), and was, towards the end of the project, beginning to explore the importance of attachment behaviour, as demonstrated by Gallagher, et al., 2016.

Whilst ‘resilience’ and ‘shared responsibility’ seem to be contemporary disaster-research buzzwords, and a current focus of much research and new policy development, there apparently remains very little happening within the cultural-social or psycho-social elements of disaster response or recovery. Surely this is a major omission. Surely out of the over 90 government and academic organisations participating in the BNHCRC there would be at least one that would be undertaking BNHCRC sponsored research into the cultural-social or psycho-social elements of disaster response and recovery. It would appear not. To date, apparently the views and conclusions of Professor Pyne, Professor Adams, the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commissioners and the Victorian Government’s Fire Recovery Unit (FRU, 2011a: 12) all continue to go unheeded.

## **Application and Policy Reform**

In recent times a greatly expanded and mainly city-based industry has sprung up within bureaucracy and universities now researching, writing papers, and presenting at conferences about the many facets of disaster. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people are now employed in this new ‘disaster industry’, yet still two things remain

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<sup>252</sup> I was involved in this project from the outset and contributed as both a survey participant and as a gatekeeper facilitating access to our local Triangle community.

apparent. First, as noted above, the cultural-social and psycho-social elements of disaster response and recovery appear to remain quite neglected in contemporary research. This should change. Secondly, what is the reality of long-term disaster recovery that is actually occurring in post-disaster communities like Marysville? The answer is – very little.<sup>253</sup> Clearly, further research is important, but how should it be applied and what policy reform could take place as a result? There are two elements to this – pre-disaster and post-disaster.

### **Pre-disaster**

Unfortunately, the pre-disaster preparation focus appears to continue to be on the hard physical assets,<sup>254</sup> (the staff, the buildings, the trucks, the aircraft, and the equipment). There is nowhere near enough investment in people and communities, and in processes that will allow and develop individuals and communities to be empowered, capable and more responsible for themselves. As Lawrence so clearly states:

Governments are no less susceptible to compulsive purchasing than the rest of us, they are in fact made up of the rest of us. We spend our money on new trucks and bits of kit, technological fixes and the latest toy the agencies across the borders have. We forget to invest in the people, to empower and support them in their own solutions.

(Lawrence, 2013: 3)

Here Lawrence highlights the problem of more ‘toys for the boys’, yet observes the precious little investment in community development and individual empowerment enabling discrete communities, be they suburban or rural, to take care of themselves. With the new focus on resilience and shared responsibility must come a sharing of power, but perhaps this still remains a bridge too far for many government authorities. Sadly, I think Lawrence is correct when she further states:

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<sup>253</sup> Apart from the work of local community foundations (such as the ‘Marysville and Triangle Community Foundation’) and the State Government’s ‘Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal’ grants program, both providing limited grant funds for small-scale community projects that assist with post-Black Saturday recovery, it could be argued that there is in fact nothing else happening at all.

<sup>254</sup> Although it must be noted that there have been some signs of a gradual shift in recent years, albeit at this stage exploratory. For example, see the “Be Ready Warrandyte” initiative (McLennan, 2015).

Government have developed such paralysing risk aversion, fuelled by the political cycle, media recriminations and the courts, that everything is reduced to the lowest common denominator.

(Lawrence, 2013: 3)

Such a risk-averse nanny state system makes freeing up individuals and communities to take responsibility for themselves and their own environmental surroundings very difficult. Again, as Lawrence so succinctly notes:

It is generally accepted that community self-reliance is essential to preparedness, but the notion of rescuer as superhero and the cult of the expert around emergency management leads to the opposite.

(Lawrence, 2013: 5)

Unfortunately, the AFAC<sup>255</sup> and BNHCRC ‘cult of the expert researcher’ also lends support to the notion of the authorities being the all-knowing command and control rescuers and the average member of the public being relegated to ignorant passive recipients, which simply perpetuates the existing command and control model. This is the opposite direction to where the findings of this thesis point. Policy reform should begin to move much more towards the direction of individual and community pre-disaster self-reliance, responsibility and empowerment.<sup>256</sup> As we have seen in Chapter Seven, some of this movement is being seen in the post-Black Saturday concept of shared responsibility. However, the paradox is that whilst government wants to minimise its own responsibility for future disaster outcomes, and thereby pass that responsibility back to individuals and the community, it seems unable to let go of the (regulatory) reins enough to actually empower individuals and the community to perform the actions they need to take in order to shoulder that responsibility. In metaphoric summary, government cannot ‘have its cake and eat it’ or ‘have a bob each way’. Indeed, Ingham and Redshaw (2017) recommend that services should adopt “strategies that promote a paradigm shift from a top-down approach to ... recovery ... being inclusive of the community at every level” (p 61).

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<sup>255</sup> AFAC: Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council.

<sup>256</sup> Not to be confused with the current ‘resilience movement’, where it seems that power and control still rest firmly with the authorities.

## **Post-disaster**

This thesis has demonstrated that there appears to be a great deal of post-disaster policy reform required – although to be fair, as noted earlier, the policies themselves are already quite comprehensive; it is the application of those policies that falls short. Some policy reform was discussed and reported in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Report. Some has already been acted upon; however, determining policy objectives and application in relation to complex post-disaster human need is not easy and remains a little-understood or explored field of human sociology and psychology. To quote Lawrence once more:

It is not an easy area for government agencies. Unlike the impact of a natural disaster where the physics are known, the arena of human thought, feeling and behaviour is a minefield.

(Lawrence, 2013: 6)

Indeed, it is a minefield, yet enough information is already available to thoroughly revise the old ways of doing things, and this thesis has now made a further substantial contribution to that knowledge. After the lessons of Black Saturday, we now know better. We have seen first-hand the ongoing mental health issues, the financial cost to the community and to the taxpayer, the marital stress and breakdown, and the physical illnesses arising from traumatic post-disaster stress. And we have seen it again in the various natural disasters that have befallen humanity both nationally and internationally since Black Saturday; more deadly fires, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis, all of which have received a great deal of media and research attention. Nevertheless, we still seem to have a very long way to go in the application of appropriate and effective post-disaster response and recovery policy and practice.

New methods of community engagement need to be developed so that helpers can understand what survivors have been through, and are continuing to go through. Such new methods need to inform helpers how best to assist survivors to meet their needs, to reconstruct their homes and rebuild their communities so as to re-establish their sense of place, their attachment to place, and to restore their secure base. That said, in a first step towards improved community engagement, the Victorian State Government has recently been proactive in this area, releasing its new ‘Community

Resilience Framework For Emergency Management’ (EMV, 2017b). Whilst this is a welcome policy initiative, it remains to be seen if this translates into any real and meaningful change.

## **Recommendations**

It would seem appropriate in concluding this thesis that I make a range of recommendations. However, as a preamble I would make this plea to the authorities; please do not treat disaster survivors as distant objects or in a childlike manner to be instructed and directed. We are neither distant, nor childlike. We are passionately connected to our people, our possessions, our pets, our place and our previous participation in our way of life. Disaster survivors deserve to be treated with respect and inclusion, and on that basis I make the following recommendations:

- 1) That there be very real recognition and understanding of the reality of attachment behaviour, a secure base, and topophilia, and of the key importance they play in relation to people’s responses and recovery after a major disaster.
- 2) That Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma and solastalgia be recognised as very real post-disaster outcomes that need to be addressed and managed through a variety of individual and community-focused recovery techniques, and through the practical implementation of individual and community development methods that focus upon soliphilia – the collective re-establishment and re-empowerment of communities.
- 3) That there be an end to the chaos, command and control model of emergency (disaster) management, as it is quite inappropriate to the future needs and abilities of the general population. It belongs to a by-gone era and should be replaced by a more inclusive system of disaster recovery.
- 4) That it be recognised that lock-outs are very damaging to disaster-affected populations and should be actively discouraged. Property owners must be allowed back to their properties as soon as the immediate (fire) danger has passed.
- 5) That immediately after a disaster has passed, issues such as power-line and tree safety, along with related issues of hazardous and toxic materials, be managed in conjunction with and alongside property owners on site, and not in their

absence, and especially, they should not be locked-out of their own property or community.

- 6) That every attempt should be made to provide all clean-up, recovery, consultative and design work to the local people who have been most affected by the disaster. Even though such a process may take a little more time, it will provide emotional and psychological benefits.
- 7) That strategies and systems to genuinely empower local people and communities, both pre-disaster by way of preparedness, and post-disaster by way of self-determination, be investigated, developed, formalised and implemented.
- 8) That a much improved model of effective community development practice be implemented by governments to practically assist in the longer-term rebuilding of communities and social capital.
- 9) That governments consider a much broader community development training regime for staff in both statutory and non-government organisations likely to be called upon to assist in the delivery of disaster recovery efforts.

These recommendations capture but some of the outcomes of this research and thesis. It is to be hoped that over time the above recommendations may be recognised as important, adopted and implemented, even though some of them may prove hard to manage and particularly challenging. We must always remember that recovery, done well, should be for the benefit of the survivors, not the managers.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this thesis I have knitted together many and varied components. I have explored and documented the experiences and challenges faced by Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors. I have explored attachment theory in detail regarding survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief, and in relation to People, Possessions, Pets, Place and Participation. And I have considered in detail what the implications are of survivors' experiences, and the challenges for understanding disaster response and recovery in the future. To that extent, I have answered the Research Questions; but this project has been so much more. It has been a personal journey of discovery and recovery, a genuine cathartic experience that I have undertaken with my fellow travellers in and around Marysville, and to them I am profoundly grateful. And as for

me, I too now need to ‘take the pause button off my life and resume where I left off’.<sup>257</sup>

However, I cannot help but think this research project has simply raised many more issues and questions than it has answered. They are issues that may not have otherwise been raised, or questions that may not have otherwise been asked, as I have not seen or heard of anyone else raising or asking them, so that too is a good outcome of this project. In Chapter One I commenced this thesis with a grey-shaded autoethnographic introduction and have included my personal accounts throughout the dissertation, so that too is where I shall conclude.

My post-fire PhD odyssey began in late 2010 with little more than traumatic personal and community experiences from what was then the recent Black Saturday bushfires. I was perplexed about what had happened during the response and recovery, and I had some ideas about attachment behaviour. The immediate response to the fires was devastating and the recovery period brought about what came to be termed by many locals as the ‘second disaster’ for Marysville.

The research proved to be inordinately complex, and at times painfully difficult, leading me down many paths and dead-ends that I could never have anticipated. I discovered so much that I’d never even thought about before, yet even after years of questioning I was still struggling to make sense of it all. My frustration was growing; I was still no closer to any meaningful explanation of what I was observing and hearing.

But then, as noted in Chapter Seven (p 228) it was in early 2013, at a bushfire recovery seminar in Kinglake, I learnt of a concept I’d never heard of before – ‘solastalgia’. From that time onwards, many things started to make sense and fall into place. I had finally begun to understand what had happened, and was still happening, to me and to those in my community. However, I sensed there was still something missing, that there was still more to it – a missing link – and that whilst I had much of the picture, I still didn’t have it all.

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<sup>257</sup> My thanks to British photojournalist and 2011 Afghanistan triple amputee, Giles Duley, for this analogy.

At the same time, from my own experience and earlier research, I was already aware of the importance of attachment to People, to Place (topophilia) and to Possessions, and that's been borne out by so many of the people I have interviewed. Yet most surprisingly, I had never even thought about attachment to Pets, despite the fact that on the evening of Black Saturday, when the fire was already consuming our town and about to consume our home, the only thought I had, and acted upon, was to rescue our dog Jack from the house before the fire struck. During the course of the research, I also discovered more about attachment to Participation in terms of community and lifestyle, and so the five Ps of attachment were also born. The research was snowballing from there.

However, that missing link still nagged me. As also noted in Chapter Seven (p 228), it was in 2016, reading Colin Murray Parkes's early (1969) work on separation anxiety as related to attachment and loss, that I first read in any detail about appraisal and searching behaviour. At last all the jigsaw pieces fell into place and the new concept of *Post-Disaster Attachment Trauma* soon emerged. I was then able to form a meaningful explanation of Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief in the post-fire recovery process that was able to stand up to rigorous scrutiny.

The research and thesis-writing process took far longer than I anticipated; 3½ years full-time and a further 3+ years part-time, almost seven years, and all the while my own personal struggles with the Black Saturday aftermath and recovery took its toll on me. I had to deal with numerous challenging personal dilemmas, including quitting my job, separation and divorce from my wife, ongoing counselling and mental-health issues, the liquidation and sale of three properties, managing and dealing with six separate sets of legal action and court cases, packing up and moving house five times, packing up and moving my parents from their home into a retirement village, the illness and death of my mother, the confronting work required of the Maurice Blackburn Class Action,<sup>258</sup> and the list just seems to go on and on, and is still far from

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<sup>258</sup> The Maurice Blackburn Class Action was a legal case whereby the firm of Maurice Blackburn initiated a class action against those held responsible for the cause of the Black Saturday fires. Parties to the class action were able to claim compensation for personal injury, business, and personal losses. The process took over four years and required individuals to attend interviews, provide detailed information, and complete a great deal of documentation. This proved very onerous and stressful for many bushfire survivors, with the result that many eligible people declined to participate and so missed out. See <https://www.mauriceblackburn.com.au/current-class-actions/bushfire-class-actions/> for more details.

finished. All of these things proved to be a constant distraction and personally stressful. Into that mix was added the academic complications of being an external rural student along with, for a range of reasons, changes to supervisors and a transfer between schools within the university. My two scholarships expired in mid 2013, so from that time on I had to be self-funded, which at times became very financially challenging.

Nevertheless, I was determined to complete the project. Despite all of the challenges and the at-times cathartic emotion and sadness, I've made it; I've completed and submitted this thesis. It's the result of much hard work, research, reading, writing, repeated iterations and editing, but now it's finished. I am grateful to all those who have assisted me and thank them for their contribution.

Sadly, during the course of the project, three of my main interviewees, along with three other people involved with the research project, have died of cancer, and two others now have terminal dementia. I especially thank these eight people for their contributions, even though they were not able to see the finished result.

I look forward to being able to translate what has been revealed in this thesis into published constructive policy outcomes.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Postscript:**

While I was in Adelaide in August working with my copy editor on the final draft of the thesis, my dog Jack was staying with my partner Liz in Melbourne. Jack died on the morning of 18/8/17, just as the last of the editing was finished. I was desperate to get back to Melbourne to see him, so I packed and left early that afternoon, arriving back at Liz's home late that night having cried for most of the drive back. I needed to confirm that he was in fact dead; I needed to see his body, to touch him and hold him as soon as I could, such was the depth of my attachment to Jack. Even though I was only vaguely aware of it at the time, I now see that this is appraisal and searching behaviour in action. Some 15 hours later after his death I was finally able to hold him and stroke him. The grieving process could then begin ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Appendix A

**Major Recorded Bushfires in Australia Incurring Death and-or  
Loss of Homes by Decade – 1851 to 2017:**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Area Burnt:</b>	<b>Deaths:</b>	<b>Damage:</b>
6 Feb 1851	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Black Thursday</i>	5,000,000+ ha <sup>259</sup>	12	1 million+ stock (estimated 25% of Victoria burnt)
<b>1850s</b>	<b>1 Recorded Fire</b>		<b>12 dead</b>	
<b>1852 to 1897</b>	<b>Nil Recorded Fires</b>		<b>Nil dead</b>	
1 Feb 1898	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Red Tuesday</i>	260,000 ha	12	2,000+ buildings
<b>1890s</b>	<b>1 Recorded Fire</b>		<b>12 dead</b>	
1905 - 1906	<b>Victoria</b>		12	56 homes
<b>1900s</b>	<b>1 Recorded Fire</b>		<b>12 dead</b>	
1912	<b>Victoria</b> Gippsland & Grampians		0	
1914	<b>Victoria</b>	100,000+ ha	0	
29 Sep 1917	<b>Queensland</b> Hughenden		3	20,000+ sheep
Sep - Oct 1918	<b>Queensland</b> Charleville		7	
1919	<b>Victoria</b> Otway Ranges		0	
<b>1910s</b>	<b>5 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>10 dead</b>	
14 Feb - Mar 1926	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Black Sunday</i>	400,000+ ha	60	1,000 buildings
1 Oct - Dec 1926	<b>New South Wales</b>	2,000,000+ ha	8	
<b>1920s</b>	<b>2 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>68 dead</b>	
4 Feb 1932	<b>Victoria</b> Gippsland		9	
Dec 1938 - Jan 1939	<b>New South Wales</b>	73,000+ ha	13	50 homes
Dec 1938 - Jan 1939	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Black Friday</i>	2,000,000+ ha	71	700 homes & 3,700 buildings
<b>1930s</b>	<b>3 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>93 dead</b>	
1940	<b>Queensland</b> Goomeri	80,000+ ha	0	
Jul 1941	<b>Queensland</b> Julia Creek	120,000+ ha	0	
3 - 4 Mar 1942	<b>Victoria</b> Gippsland		1	20 homes
22 Dec 1943	<b>Victoria</b> Wangaratta		10	
14 Jan - 14 Feb 1944	<b>Victoria</b> Western District	1,000,000+ ha	32	700+ stock
<b>1940s</b>	<b>5 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>43 dead</b>	
Jan 1951	<b>Queensland</b> Charleville	2,834,000 ha	1	
1 Dec 1951	<b>ACT</b>	10,000+ ha	2	2 homes & 40 buildings
Nov 1951 - Jan 1952	<b>New South Wales</b>	4,500,000+ ha	11	10,000+ stock

<sup>259</sup> ha = hectare.

Dec 1951 - Mar 1952	<b>Victoria</b> Benalla	1,500,000+ ha	10	
14 Nov 1954	<b>Queensland</b> Hughenden	At Narollah Station	3	
2 Jan 1955	<b>South Australia</b> <i>Black Sunday</i>	40,000+ ha	2	
Nov 1955	<b>Queensland</b> Muttaborra		2	
30 Nov 1957	<b>New South Wales</b> Blue Mountains		4	158 homes
5 Aug 1958	<b>South Australia</b> Wandilo		8	
<b>1950s</b>	<b>9 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>43 dead</b>	
Jan - Mar 1961	<b>Western Australia</b>	1,800,000+ ha	0	160 homes
14 - 16 Jan 1962	<b>Victoria</b> Dandenongs & Warrandyte		8	450+ homes
Jan 1964	<b>Queensland</b> Roundstone	92,000+ ha	0	
17 Jan 1965	<b>Victoria</b> Longwood	100,000+ ha	7	6 homes
21 Feb - 13 Mar 1965	<b>Victoria</b> Gippsland	800,000 ha	3	60 buildings & 4,000+ stock
Jan 1965	<b>Queensland</b> Croydon	98,000+ ha	0	
5 - 14 Mar 1965	<b>New South Wales</b> South East	80,000+ ha	3	59 homes
7 Feb 1967	<b>Tasmania</b> <i>Black Tuesday</i>	264,000 ha	62	1,293 homes, 128 buildings, 85,000 stock
19 Feb 1968	<b>Victoria</b> Dandenong Ranges	1,920 ha	0	64 homes & 10 buildings
Sep 1968 – Jan 1969	<b>New South Wales</b> Blue Mounatins +	2,000,000+ ha	14	150 homes & 80 buildings
8 Jan 1969	<b>Victoria</b> Central & Lara	800,000 ha	23	230 houses, 21 buildings & 12,000+ stock
<b>1960s</b>	<b>11 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>120 dead</b>	
14 Dec 1972	<b>Victoria</b> Mt Buffalo	12,140 ha	0	
1972 - 1973	<b>New South Wales</b> South East	200,000+ ha	0	
Nov 1974	<b>Queensland</b> Bulloo/Boulia	7,300,000+ ha	0	
1975 - 1975	<b>New South Wales</b> Statewide	3,755,000+ ha	3	50,000+ stock
May 1976	<b>Queensland</b> Julia Creek	1,891,000+ ha	0	
1976 - 1977	<b>New South Wales</b> Blue Mountains +	75,000+ ha	0	
12 Feb 1977	<b>Victoria</b> Western District	103,000 ha	4	116 homes, 340 buildings & 236,000+ stock
1977 - 1978	<b>New South Wales</b> Blue Mountains +	54,000+ ha	0	49 homes
1 Jan 1978	<b>Western Australia</b>	31,500 ha	2	
15 Jan 1978	<b>Victoria</b> Bairnsdale		2	1 house, 36 buildings & 6,500 stock
4 April 1978	<b>Western Australia</b>	114,000 ha	2	6 buildings
1978 - 1979	<b>New South Wales</b> Southern Highlands	50,000+ ha	0	5 homes

1979	<b>Queensland</b> McKinlay Shire	421,000+ ha	0	
1979 - 1980	<b>New South Wales</b> Statewide	1,000,000+ ha	5	28 homes, 20 damaged
<b>1970s</b>	<b>14 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>18 dead</b>	
20 Feb 1980	<b>South Australia</b>	8,000+ ha	0	51 homes, 1 building
3 Nov 1980	<b>New South Wales</b> Waterfall	1,000,000+ ha	5	14 homes
28 Dec 1980 - 6 Jan 1981	<b>Victoria</b> Big Desert	119,000+ ha	0	
9 Jan 1983	<b>New South Wales</b> South East	60,000+ ha	3	
Jan 1983	<b>Victoria</b> Cann River	250,000+ ha	0	
1 Feb 1983	<b>Victoria</b> Mt Macedon	6,100+ ha	0	50 homes
16 Feb 1983	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	210,000+ ha	47	1,620+ homes, 1,820 buildings & 32,400 stock
16 Feb 1983	<b>South Australia</b> <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	208,000+ ha	28	383 homes, 200 buildings & 200,000+ stock
1 Sep 1984 - Feb 1985	<b>New South Wales</b> Statewide	3,500,000+ ha	4	40,000+ stock
14 Jan 1985	<b>Victoria</b> Central	120,000+ ha	3	180+ homes, 500 farms & 46,000+ stock
17 Jan 1987	<b>New South Wales</b> Bethungra & Yanco	85,000+ ha	3	
<b>1980s</b>	<b>11 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>93 dead</b>	
27 Dec 1990 - 10 Jan 1991	<b>Victoria</b> Central		1	17 homes, 166 buildings & 13,500 stock
Sep 1991	<b>Queensland</b> Coastal & Hinterland		4	
16 Oct 1991	<b>New South Wales</b> Murrumbidgee	200,000+ ha	0	100,000+ sheep
Nov 1991	<b>New South Wales</b> Carathool	80,000+ ha	0	8 homes, 77,000+ stock
Oct 1991 - Jan 1992	<b>New South Wales</b> Central Coast		2	14 homes
Nov 1992	<b>Queensland</b> Esk	40,000+ ha		
Dec 1993 - Jan 1994	<b>New South Wales</b> Coastal	800,000+ ha	4	225 homes
27 Sep 1994	<b>Queensland</b> Coastal	5,000+ ha	0	23 homes
1995	<b>Queensland</b> South Coastal	333,000+ ha	0	
8 Jan 1997	<b>Western Australia</b> Wooroloo	10,500 ha	0	16 homes
19 Jan 1997	<b>Victoria</b> Dandenongs	4,150+ ha	3	45 homes
20 Nov 1997	<b>New South Wales</b>	500,000+ ha	4	10 homes
2 Dec 1997	<b>New South Wales</b> Lithgow		2	
2 Dec 1997	<b>Western Australia</b>	23,000 ha	2	1 home
Jan 1998	<b>Victoria</b> Gippsland	32,000 ha	0	
2 Dec 1998	<b>Victoria</b> Linton	780+ ha	5	

<b>1990s</b>	<b>16 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>27 dead</b>	
8 Jun 2000	<b>New South Wales</b>	Mount Ku-ring-gai	4	
18 Dec 2000	<b>Victoria</b>	14,500+ ha	0	1 home & 8,000 stock
Aug 2001	<b>Queensland</b> Lawn Hill	1,600,000 ha	0	
24 Dec 2001 - 11 Jan 2002	<b>New South Wales</b>	740,000 ha	0	121 homes, 433 buildings & 7,043 stock
17 Oct 2002	<b>Queensland</b> Granite Belt	40,000+ ha	1	10 homes & 11 buildings
Mar 2002	<b>Victoria</b> Glenaroua	6,100+ ha		1 home
9 Oct 2002	<b>New South Wales</b>		0	10 homes
Dec 2002	<b>Victoria</b> Big Desert	181,400 ha	0	
July 2002 - Feb 2003	<b>New South Wales</b>	1,464,000+ ha	3	86 homes & 3,400 stock
18 - 22 Jan 2003	<b>ACT</b> Canberra suburbs	160,000+ ha	4	488 homes & 100 buildings
8 Jan - 19 Mar 2003	<b>Victoria</b> Alpine area	1,300,000+ ha	3	41 homes, 213 buildings & 10,000+ stock
Dec 2003	<b>Western Australia</b> Tenterden	2,100,000 ha	2	
10 - 12 Jan 2005	<b>South Australia</b> Eyre Peninsula	890,000 ha	9	93 homes & 47,000+ stock
31 Dec 2005 - 31 Jan 2006	<b>Victoria</b> Grampians	160,000 ha	2	57 homes, 359 buildings & 65,000 stock
Jan 2006	<b>New South Wales</b> Central Coast		0	
Jan 2006	<b>New South Wales</b> Junee	30,000 ha	0	7 homes & 4 buildings & 20,000+ stock
Jan - Feb 2006	<b>Victoria</b> Central	84,000 ha	2	
Feb 2006	<b>New South Wales</b> Wagga Wagga	9,000 ha	0	2 buildings & 2,500+ stock
1 Dec 2006 - 7 Feb 2007	<b>Victoria</b> Great Divide	1,200,000+ ha	1	51 homes, 255 buildings & 1,741 stock
Feb 2007	<b>Western Australia</b> Dwellingup	12,000 ha	0	16 homes
Dec 2007	<b>South Australia</b> Kangaroo Island	95,000 ha	1	
28 Dec 2007	<b>Western Australia</b> Boorabbin	40,000 ha	3	
28 Jan 2009	<b>Victoria</b> Delburn	6,534 ha		44 homes
4-6 Feb 2009	<b>Victoria</b> Bunyip	26,200 ha		31 homes
7 Feb - Mar 2009	<b>Victoria</b> <i>Black Saturday</i>	450,000+ ha	173	2,056 homes & 2,000+ buildings & 11,800 stock
Dec 2009	<b>Western Australia</b> Toodyay	3,000+ ha	0	38 homes
<b>2000s</b>	<b>26 Recorded Fires</b>		<b>208 dead</b>	
Jan 2011	<b>Western Australia</b> Lake Clifton	2,000+ ha	0	10 homes
5 Feb 2011	<b>Western Australia</b> Roleystone	1,540+ ha	0	72 homes, 32 damaged
1 Aug 2011 - Oct 2011	<b>Queensland</b>	Statewide	0	

23 Nov 2011	<b>Western Australia</b> Margaret River	58,000+ ha	0	32 homes & 13 buildings
Dec 2011 - Feb 2012	<b>Western Australia</b> Carnarvon	800,000+ ha	0	11 pastoral stations
3 Jan 2013	<b>Tasmania</b> Statewide	36,000+ ha	1	203+ homes & 212 buildings
Jan 2013	<b>Victoria</b> South West		0	
7 Jan 2013	<b>New South Wales</b> Statewide	131,000+ ha	0	53 homes, 118 sheds & 12,000+ stock
17 Oct 2013	<b>New South Wales</b> Blue Mountains	100,000+ ha	2	248 homes, 109 damaged
12 Jan 2014	<b>Western Australia</b> Perth Hills	386 ha	1	56 homes
17 Jan 2014	<b>South Australia</b> Eden Valley	100,000 ha	0	15 homes
17 Jan 2014	<b>Victoria</b> Grampians	52,000+ ha	1	32 homes
6 Feb 2014	<b>South Australia</b> Finders Ranges	30,000 ha	0	
9 Feb 2014	<b>Victoria</b> Near Melbourne	350,000 ha	0	45 homes 9,000+ stock
Jan - Feb 2014	<b>Western Australia</b> Northcliffe	98,923 ha	0	1 home
Jan 2015	<b>Western Australia</b> Boddington	52,373 ha	0	1 home
Oct - Nov 2015	<b>Western Australia</b> Esperance	200,000+ ha	4	10+ homes, 15,000+ stock
15 - 24 Nov 2015	<b>Western Australia</b> Perth Hills	10,016 ha	0	
Dec 2015	<b>Victoria</b> Wye River	3,000+ ha	0	116 homes
Jan 2016	<b>Western Australia</b> Yarloop	69,165 ha	2	181 homes (166 in Yarloop)
11 - 14 Feb 2017	<b>New South Wales</b> Central West	52,000+ ha	0	35 homes
17 - 18 Feb 2017	<b>New South Wales</b> Carwoola	3,500+ ha	0	11 homes (12 damaged)
<b>2010s</b>	<b>22 Recorded Fires to date</b>		<b>11 dead to date</b>	

**NB 1:** It would appear there are no recorded bushfire-related deaths in the Northern Territory (NT) and despite the fact that the NT has a very large number of annual bushfires, there appear to be no recorded major bushfire events either.

**NB 2:** Some figures, particularly deaths, vary greatly depending upon the information source. The above figures are compiled using the most common information available.

## Number of Major Recorded Bushfires and Bushfire Deaths in Australia by Decade

**1851 – 2017:**

1850s	1 Fire	12 dead
1860s to 1880s	Nil Fires	0 dead
1890s	1 Fire	12 dead
1900s	1 Fire	12 dead
1910s	5 Fires	10 dead
1920s	2 Fires	68 dead
1930s	3 Fires	93 dead
1940s	5 Fires	43 dead
1950s	9 Fires	43 dead
1960s	11 Fires	120 dead
1970s	14 Fires	18 dead
1980s	11 Fires	93 dead
1990s	16 Fires	27 dead
2000s	26 Fires	208 dead
2010s	22 Fires to date	11 dead to date
<b>166 years</b>	<b>127 major fires</b>	<b>770 dead</b>

Victoria	44 major fires
New South Wales	33 major fires
Queensland	19 major fires
Western Australia	19 major fires
South Australia	8 major fires
Tasmania	2 major fires
Australian Capital Territory	2 major fires
<b>Total:</b>	<b>127 major fires</b>

By way of basic analysis, there is a major<sup>260</sup> bushfire somewhere in Australia every one or two years, although the frequency has greatly increased in the last two to three decades. There is also the likelihood of an average of four to five bushfire related deaths each year. By way of State and Territory average, in Victoria there is a major fire every three to four years, in New South Wales every five years, in Queensland every nine years, in Western Australia also every nine years (although that frequency would seem to have greatly increased over the last decade), in South Australia every twenty-one years, and in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory every eighty-three years.

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<sup>260</sup> A major bushfire is defined as one in which a life or lives have been lost, where there have been extensive property and livestock losses, and-or a very large amount of land area has been burnt.

**Sources:**

NB: Some figures vary widely depending upon the source.

Hinde, J., Metzger, S., Naik, A. and Richards, R. (2013). *Unit on natural disasters: The impact of, preparing for, recovering from and managing such disasters*. TCHE 2205 Humanities and Global Education. RMIT University.

Tibbits, A., Handmer, J., Haynes, K., Lowe, T. and Whittaker, J. (2008). Prepare, stay and defend or leave: Evidence for the Australian approach. In J. Handmer and K. Haynes, (Eds.). *Community bushfire safety*. (pp 59-71.) Melbourne, Vic.: CSIRO Publishing.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushfires\\_in\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushfires_in_Australia)

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/fire-and-other-emergencies/major-bushfires-in-victoria>

[http://www.emknowledge.gov.au/category/?id=1&events\\_page=1#events\\_paging](http://www.emknowledge.gov.au/category/?id=1&events_page=1#events_paging)

<https://www.google.com.au/#q=homes+destroyed+perth+fire+january+2014&tbm=news>

<https://www.australiasevereweather.com/fires/history.htm>

\* \* \* \* \*

**Marysville *Black Saturday* Bushfire Survivors’ Experiences of Preparedness, Survival, Attachment, Loss, Grief, Resilience and Recovery**

David Barton

Version Four

9/2/2012

**Interview Questions – Pro-Forma:**

**Introduction:**

- Ensure that the participant has read and understands the Project Information Statement. Answer any additional questions that the participant may have.
- Ensure that the participant has read, understands, completed and signed the Prescribed Consent Form.

**Background:**

*Relates to Research Question #1:* “What were *Black Saturday* survivors’ experiences of ‘community’, including bushfire preparation, in the town of Marysville before the fire?”

1. What is your name, and your age? ..... Age: .....
2. How long have you lived in Marysville? ..... Date: ..... Years: .....
3. Please tell me about how you came to live in Marysville?
4. What did you do in Marysville pre- *Black Saturday*?
5. Can you tell me from your perspective generally about the pre-fire community of Marysville?
6. Tell me about your own personal experience of community in Marysville?
7. Were you a member of any community groups or organisations of any type?
8. What was your view or understanding of the fire risk in Marysville?
9. What was your response to that view or understanding – what did you do?
10. What preparations had you made specifically to address any perceived fire risks?

***Black Saturday:***

*Relates to Research Question #2:* “What were the survivors’ experiences on *Black Saturday* (including how and when they were warned and how they responded)?”

11. Can you tell me your story of *Black Saturday*? Start where you want to start and finish where you want to finish.
  - When did you realise that Marysville was under threat?

- What was your experience of warnings? Did you receive any?
- Did you warn anyone else?
- What was your experience of Emergency Services Personnel (ie: Police, CFA, and SES).
- Where were you and what did you do when the fire came into town?

12. Where did you stay on the Saturday night? What was that like for you?

13. Did you have other family and friends in town at the time? What happened to them?

14. When did you find out that you had lost your house?

15. How did you react when you discovered that the town of Maysville was to all intents and purposes gone?

16. How did you react when you discovered that your house and possessions were also gone?

### **The Aftermath:**

*Relates to Research Question #3: "What were the survivors' experiences immediately after the fire and what did the survivors' lose (and gain) as a result?"*

17. What did you do immediately after the fire, from first thing Sunday morning through the next few weeks?

18. Where did you stay once you knew that your home was destroyed?

19. How did you react to that?

20. What was your experience of the 'lock-out', of not being allowed back into Marysville?

21. What were your thoughts about all the burnt motor vehicles being collected and taken to the old mill site?

22. Where are you living now?

23. Why did you decide to stay in Marysville? OR Why did you decide to leave Marysville?

24. Was your decision to stay (or leave) Marysville an immediate decision that you made right after the fire and have stuck to, or has it taken you some time to come to this final decision. Why do you think that is?

25. Please tell me what your life journey has been like for you since the fire?

26. Did you attend any of the relief centres after the fire? How did you feel about that?

27. Did you have a case-worker after the fire? How did that work for you and was it helpful? In what way?
28. Did you make use of the 1800 number DHS Bushfire Community Support Helpline at all, and was it helpful if you did?
29. Do you think you are financially better off, worse off or about the same as you were before the fire?
30. Do you think you are emotionally better off, worse off or about the same as you were before the fire?
31. Do you think you are mentally better off, worse off or about the same as you were before the fire?
32. Have you contemplated suicide since the fire?
33. Can you tell me from your perspective generally about the post-fire community of Marysville?
34. Tell me about your own personal experience of post-fire community in Marysville and of what you think about that?
35. What do you think is the future for Marysville? What will it be like in say, 5-10 years time?

**Personal Impact:**

*Relates to Research Question #4: "What are the survivors' experiences of attachment, loss, grief, resilience and recovery since the *Black Saturday* event?"*

36. What was your reaction when you finally got to go to your property?
37. Had your property been searched by the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Teams, and was your property further damaged as a result? How did you feel about that?
38. Did you spend time looking through the rubble?
39. Did you save many items, and what sort of things did you save?
40. Why did you save those particular items? How do you feel about those particular items?
41. What do you consider to be your most significant losses in the fire?
42. How does the loss of your possessions affect you?
43. Has that affected your view of possessions now?
44. Did you attend any community events, eg: funerals, dinners, etc? What was your experience of that and how did you feel about it?

45. Did you attend any community meetings about the rebuilding of Marysville? What was your experience of that and how did you feel about it?
46. What has the personal effect of this experience been on you? Have you experienced a range of emotions such as anger, sadness, grief, elation, depression or suicidal thoughts?
47. What has the personal effect been of all of this on your spouse/ partner/ children? Have they experienced anger, sadness, grief, elation, depression or suicidal thoughts?
48. What have your personal relationships been like since the fire?
49. Are your personal family relationships better, worse or about the same as before the fire?
50. Have you sought or attended any type of personal assistance or support by way of counselling or group work sessions?
51. Can you tell me if you have experienced a sense of 'grief' as a result of the *Black Saturday* fire and if and how that has affected your life?
52. Can you tell me if your view of the world (your worldview), or your spirituality, or your belief in God (if you have or had one) has changed since the fire, and as a result of the fire?
53. What does the term 'recovery' mean to you and can you tell me about your experience of this concept.
54. What does the term 'resilience' mean to you and can you tell me about your experience of this concept.
55. What do you grieve the loss of most of all?
56. What do you think is the single most important thing that you would like to tell me about the experience?
57. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that we have not mentioned, but that you think is important?
58. That brings us to the end of the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to say or add?

**De-Briefing:**

59. How are you feeling right now about your participation in this interview process?
60. Have you felt that this has been a valuable process for you, or has it re-ignited painful feelings and thoughts for you? What can you tell me about that?

\* \* \* \* \*

## RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee Notice of Approval



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)  
Research and Innovation office

### Notice of Approval

Date: **20 September 2011**

Project number: **47/11**

Project title: *Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors' experiences of preparedness, survival, attachment, loss, grief, resilience and recovery*

Risk classification: **More than low risk**

Investigator: **David Barton**

Approved: From: **20 September 2011** To: **31 December 2012**

#### Terms of approval:

- 1. Responsibilities of investigator**  
It is the responsibility of the above investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is only valid whilst investigator holds a position at RMIT University.
- 2. Amendments**  
Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.
- 3. Adverse events**  
You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
- 4. Plain Language Statement (PLS)**  
The PLS and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PLS must contain a complaints clause including the above project number.
- 5. Annual reports**  
Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report.
- 6. Final report**  
A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- 7. Monitoring**  
Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.
- 8. Retention and storage of data**  
The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

A/Prof Barbara Polus  
Chairperson  
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke (Ethics Officer/HREC secretary), Prof Peter Fairbrother (supervisor).

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**Approval Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2011

**Approval Number:** 47/11

## Ethics Proposal Amendments and Risk Mitigation Strategy

David Barton  
School of Management

HREC Application Number: **HREC 47/11**

<b>No:</b>	<b>Required Amendment:</b>	<b>Researcher Undertaking:</b>
1	Persons who are at risk of suicide must be excluded from the study (i.e. suicide risk is an exclusion criterion).	Persons who are at risk of suicide will be excluded from the study.
2	If an individual is identified, during the course of the research, to have suicidal tendencies, that person must be excluded from the study. In this situation, an appropriate risk mitigation strategy must be put in place.	Persons who are identified as having suicidal tendencies will be excluded from the study. The risk mitigation strategy is detailed at Appendix 1.
3	Where the researcher was to be informed that a third person (uninvolved in the project) was reported to have experienced suicidal thoughts the researcher would endeavour to confirm this information and arrange appropriate support.	If the researcher is informed that any person, including a third person uninvolved in the project, was reported to have experienced suicidal thoughts the researcher will endeavour to confirm this information and arrange appropriate support. Appropriate support is detailed in Appendix 2.
4	Respondents are asked 'What preparation had you made specifically to address any perceived fire risks?' The committee was concerned that if a participant's response indicated they had been negligent that they could then face action from their insurer. The committee noted that this risk could be mitigated by the placement of the following or similar statement in the PLS: 'If you choose to provide your name and details this will be publicly accessible'.	The researcher is aware that because of the severity and intensity of the fire, insurance companies have not generally sought information regarding preparation to address bushfire risks. Nevertheless, the statement 'If you choose to provide your name and details this will be publicly accessible' shall be placed in the PLS (revised copy attached).
5	The Committee determined that participants should be allowed to read questions before they commit to whether they will be identified. Because the questions cover sensitive issues the participants may wish to consider them before indicating whether they are to be identified.	It was always the intention of the researcher to allow all participants to peruse and read the questions prior to commencing any interview. The question regarding whether or not the participant wishes to be identified shall be asked again at the conclusion of the interview.
6	The Committee noted that children may be included in the study. The researcher will need to develop specific strategies for their inclusion, e.g. parental involvement in interviews and specific questionnaires, etc.	This point is acknowledged and agreed to. However, the researcher is of the view that it is most unlikely that any children shall be interviewed. If they are, the Committee's advice shall be followed.
7	The PLS should mention that research is being conducted for a PhD, and therefore that material will be available in various forums, publications, conferences, etc. As it is digitised the thesis will also be available on the WWW. This needs to be made clear in the PLS.	This information will be included in the PLS and has been made clear (revised copy attached).
8	The HREC noted that a book may result from this research and that if this was the	This is correct. Given the different nature of a book publication, renegotiation of the terms of consent

	case the researcher would be required to re-negotiate the terms of consent with the participants.	would be required with any participant who may appear either directly or indirectly in the publication.
9	The mobile number on the application has too many digits.	The mobile phone number has been corrected. The correct number is 0428 753 751.

The following contingency plans have been put in place:

- 1) The investigator is a trained, qualified and experienced counsellor. Should any emotional or psychological issues arise, the investigator is well equipped to handle it.
- 2) The investigator is a trained, qualified and experienced First-Aider through his experience with the State Emergency Service. He has a current First Aid Certificate.
- 3) A de-briefing element will be a part of the closing stage of the interview process.

### **Appendix 1:**

#### **Suicide Risk Mitigation Strategy:**

If an individual or study participant is identified during the course of the research to have suicidal tendencies, that person will be immediately excluded from the study and the following process implemented.

1. The course of the discussion or interview would be immediately terminated.
2. The researcher would commence exploratory discussion with the individual to ascertain the extent of the issue.
3. If appropriate, the researcher would strongly advise the participant to seek assistance and to call the Suicide Call-back Service on 1300 659 467.
4. The researcher would then, with the consent of the person concerned, make a referral to either the local Salvation Army 'Pathways' program worker on 0408 774 917 and/or Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) on 9871 1800, and/or the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) Specialist Bereavement Counsellor for Marysville, local resident Mrs Vera Gill, on 0415 060 567. All three organisations are well known to the Marysville community and already work with a number of clients in the town.
5. The researcher would follow-up within 48 hours to check on how the person is going.
6. The researcher would conduct ongoing follow-up of the individual as required.
7. The researcher would report the incident to his RMIT Senior Supervisor.

I believe that the above would be about the limits of the researcher's obligations and authority to act.

### **Appendix 2:**

#### **Support Arrangements for Potentially Suicidal Persons:**

If a potentially suicidal person were to be identified either directly or indirectly by the researcher then the following would occur:

##### **Part1:**

1. If the person is known personally to the researcher, contact would be made and sensitive exploratory discussions conducted.
2. If it were to be ascertained that the person is suicidal, he or she would be strongly advised to seek assistance and to call the Suicide Call-back Service on 1300 659 467.
3. With the consent of the person concerned, the researcher would also make a referral to either the local Salvation Army 'Pathways' program worker on 0408 774 917 and/or Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) on 9871 1800, and/or the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) Specialist Bereavement Counsellor for Marysville,

local resident Mrs Vera Gill, on 0415 060 567. All three organisations are well known to the Marysville community and already work with a number of clients in the town.

4. The researcher would follow-up within 48 hours to check on how the person is going, and again whenever necessary.
5. The researcher would report the incident to his RMIT Senior Supervisor.

**Part 2:**

1. If the person is not known personally to the researcher, contact would be made with other persons (via the initial contact person) who do know the person and sensitive exploratory discussions would be conducted.
2. The researcher would strongly suggest to the person who does know the person concerned that they see if they can assist the person by talking with him or her and by providing the above information as per points 2 and 3.
3. If the person who knows the person concerned is uncomfortable with the above suggestion, then the researcher would seek an introduction to the person concerned via the third party and then have the discussion as per points 2-4. On the basis of the outcome of the discussion, the researcher may then make a direct referral to one of the services noted above as per points 2 and 3.
4. The researcher would conduct follow-up of the individual as required.
6. The researcher would report the incident to his RMIT Senior Supervisor.

I believe that the above would be about the limits of the researcher's obligations and authority to act.

\* \* \* \* \*

I believe that the above effectively addresses the amendments as required by the RMIT Ethics Committee for the approval of my "More Than Low Risk" research proposal.

Yours sincerely,

David Barton



RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee – Plain Language Statement:

## Invitation to Participate in a Research Project – Project Information Statement –

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### RMIT College of Business – School of Management

**Project Title:** Marysville *Black Saturday* Bushfire Survivors' Experiences of Preparedness, Survival, Attachment, Loss, Grief, Resilience and Recovery.

**Investigators:** David Barton, PhD (Candidate)  
Prof. Peter Fairbrother, PhD (Project Supervisor)

Dear potential project participant,

You are invited to participate in a PhD research project being conducted by RMIT University. This information sheet describes the project in straightforward language, or 'plain English'. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators. This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.

#### Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

The research project is being conducted by PhD candidate Mr David Barton, along with RMIT University Supervisor, Professor Peter Fairbrother. The project is being conducted to better understand the human response to bushfire disaster in the phases of preparation, survival and recovery. The project forms a part of a RMIT Doctor of Philosophy program and has been approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee. The study is being funded in part by the Commonwealth Government and the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. When the PhD is completed, the material will be available in various forums, publications, conferences, etc, and the digitised thesis will be available on the Internet.

#### Why have you been approached?

You have been approached to participate in this project because you either were or still are a member of the Marysville community at the time of the 2009 *Black Saturday* bushfire event, and/or because you have had a role in the recovery of the Marysville community since that time. In addition, you have been approached because you are either personally known to the principal investigator or have been recommended by another person to the principal investigator as being a person who could make a valuable contribution to the research project. Your contact details were readily available in the public arena. Participation is entirely voluntary, and no remuneration is payable.

#### What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

The research aims to consider *Black Saturday* bushfire survivors' experiences of preparedness, survival, attachment, loss, grief, resilience and recovery specifically within the Marysville community. As a case-study project, the outcomes are intended to inform both government and non-government agencies of how small communities prepare for bushfire, respond when a major bushfire occurs and recover after the event. Specifically, the project shall consider the human responses of attachment, loss and grief in relation to a significant change in community structure. It is anticipated that up to 100 people will participate in the project research.

#### If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If you agree to participate, Mr Barton will interview you at a mutually convenient time and place to work through a series of interview questions regarding your pre, actual and post *Black Saturday* experiences. The interview will primarily focus upon what you have experienced since the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, by way of your recovery. A copy of the interview questions can be provided for you well prior to the interview for you to both consider your answers and to see if you are happy to proceed. The length of the interview would vary depending upon how much detail you would like to share, but would typically last for between 40-90 minutes. If you agree, we would also like to do an audio recording of the interview.

### **What are the risks or disadvantages associated with participation?**

There are no physical risks associated with participation in the project other than those that may arise in the course of normal daily activities and you are free to withdraw your involvement at any time. However, should you experience an emotional or traumatic reaction to some of the issues raised during the interview, the tape recorder will be switched off and, if desired, the interview terminated. Mr Barton is a trained, qualified and experienced counsellor, so in the first instance he is able to manage any issues that may arise. If necessary, he may suggest additional professional assistance and is able to refer you to appropriate practitioners. Note that your anonymity, privacy and confidentiality is assured and methodological steps are taken in the research to ensure that your identity is not revealed. Should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the project, please contact the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, via the details listed below.

### **What are the benefits associated with participation?**

The study explores an important yet under-researched area of the human reaction and response to bushfire and disaster recovery. It is anticipated that the study will make a positive contribution to the body of knowledge that will assist in effective response and recovery for communities and individuals, especially in relation to interventions by government and non-government organisations.

### **What will happen to the information I provide?**

The information provided by you will be used to write reports, conference papers and other academic publications. Only pseudonyms will be used and possible identifying details will be masked. You will not be identified by name in any written documents (unless written approval is given by you). The interview tapes and written notes will be kept in a locked safe by the principal researcher for a period of five years and then destroyed. However, information may be disclosed if: 1) it is to protect you or others from harm; 2) if a Court Order is produced; 3) you provide the researchers with written permission. A brief yet relatively detailed Plain Language Report shall be made available to all participants at the conclusion of the project should you desire to receive one. Please note that if you choose to provide your name and details this will be publicly accessible.

### **What are my rights as a participant?**

As a participant, you have the right to:

- Withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice.
- Have the tape recorder turned off at any time.
- Have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- Have any questions answered at any time.

### **Whom should I contact if I have any questions?**

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact one of the investigators:

David Barton, PhD (Candidate)

Prof. Peter Fairbrother, PhD.  
RMIT University Project Supervisor  
RMIT School of Management  
Level 16, 255 Bourke St. Melbourne

Yours sincerely,

#### **David Barton**

PhD (Cand), MA (R), BA (CC), Dip YW,  
Dip CMCM, Cert II PS (SES-R), Cert TES,  
Cert YSRA, CPL (H), PPL (A).

#### **Peter Fairbrother**

BA (Hons), DPhil.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research and Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251.

Details of the complaints procedure are available from <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=2jqrn7hnpyo>



## Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosure of Personal Information

### RMIT College of Business – School of Management

**Project Title:** Marysville *Black Saturday* Bushfire Survivors’ Experiences of Preparedness, Survival, Attachment, Loss, Grief, Resilience and Recovery.

**Name of Investigators:** David Barton  
Peter Fairbrother

**Name of Participant:** .....

I declare that:

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which, including details of the interview, have been explained to me.
3. I authorise the investigator to interview me.
4. I give my permission to be audio recorded:  Yes  No
5. I give my permission for my identity to be revealed:  Yes  No
6. I acknowledge that:
  - (a) Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
  - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
  - (c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
  - (d) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure, or as required by law.
  - (e) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to RMIT University and to the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

### Participant’s Consent:

**Participant:** ..... **Date:** ..... / ..... / 20.....  
(Signature)

**Witness:** ..... **Date:** ..... / ..... / 20.....  
(Signature)

*Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.*

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Research and Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. HREC Project Approval Number: 47/11  
Details of the complaints procedure are available from <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=2jqrn7hnpyo>

**David Barton: My Personal Account of Black Saturday**  
**Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009 – as submitted to the**  
**Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC)**  
**on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2010.<sup>261</sup>**

**Prelude:**

In the days leading up to Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, there were many warnings about what the weather was going to be like; the conditions were predicted to be worse than those associated with the 1939 and 1983 bushfires. The forecast was for a searingly hot day with strong northerly winds, a recipe for serious bushfire threat, and coming on top of earlier such days in late January, the whole State of Victoria was as dry as a chip.

We were told that there was to be ‘a late change’ so I said to Jennifer (my wife) “it won’t get that hot if there’s going to be a late change”. I thought that from what I’d heard it was to be a late ‘cool change’ but it was in fact to be a late ‘wind change’, one that along with the shift in wind direction accompanying it, would seal the fate of Marysville and our home along with it. The temperature recorded in Marysville at 4.00pm was over 50°C and at 5.30pm it was 56°C. I was as naïve and complacent as the rest of the townsfolk, thinking that we were safe in the middle of Marysville. I said to Jennifer a number of times during Friday and Saturday, “don’t worry, entire towns don’t burn down”. But it seems they do, and I should have known that because I knew that the entire town of Woods Point burnt down in 1939 and most of the town of Cockatoo burnt down in 1983.

Clearly I had not fully considered the risks and failed to make adequate preparation for any kind of fire emergency, let alone what was about to come of which not much could have prepared us for anyway. However, if we had been even in the least bit prepared we could have at least escaped with a few precious possessions if we’d given some thought as to what was important to have pre-packed. Because we lived in the middle of Marysville we thought we were safe; the thought of the possible need for evacuation never even occurred to us.

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<sup>261</sup> As amended and corrected for minor errors in time and place.

### **The Morning:**

From early in the morning Jennifer and I had been working on pulling down our side boundary fence adjacent to the Service Station as we were due to have a new fence erected on Monday morning. It was very hot work and we took a number of breaks, but made good progress. By mid-morning we had the trailer full of old fence palings, tree branches and ivy. There was not a cloud in the sky, it was just a very hot day, but quite enjoyable too.

Late on Saturday morning I went to the Lolly Shop to get some Turkish Bread as was our custom. I spoke briefly with Di James about how hot it was and she said she was concerned about the chocolates getting too warm and going soft. I pointed to the air conditioner and said how nice and cool it was. She replied that it wasn't the shop that was the concern, but the storeroom that had thousands of dollars worth of chocolates in it, and that it had no air conditioner. I could see her point. I commented to Julie how lovely the shop was looking and how full of stock it was. The new produce section was looking fabulous. Little did Di or Julie know that in less than 8 hours they would not only have melted chocolates, but no Lolly Shop either. I took my Turkish Bread home with me, and Jennifer and I had lunch.

### **The Afternoon:**

Early in the afternoon, our local electrician and friend David Littlejohn called in for a visit and a cup of tea. We had some discussion about our proposed renovations for the back part of our home and the location of the fridge which had been an ongoing problem. We then went down to the garage/workshop and drew up a plan for the location of the fluorescent lights, power points and switches since I had just finished fully enclosing the garage with two brand new roller doors and additional cladding. David left and I went into the adjacent Service Station/hardware store to purchase some line-marking paint (to mark out where the new fence was to go the next day) from Kevin Bradwell.<sup>262</sup>

At 2.00pm in the afternoon there was not a cloud in the sky; we rested inside because

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<sup>262</sup> Kevin and I had a brief chat as we often did. Little did he or I know that he had less than 6 hours to live. Kevin was a part-time hardware store worker and an accomplished ballroom dancer and dancing instructor, who had taught Jennifer and me. He'd been a Marysville SES member and a trainee ambulance officer. He was found dead at his burnt-out home the following morning.

of the extreme heat. Jennifer and I were at the time both members of the Marysville State Emergency Service (SES). At 2.44pm we received an SES pager notification of a tree down on the Maroondah Highway. Neither Jennifer nor I attended as we were starting to put together some fire protection – just in case. We had heard there was a possibility of fires in the area, even though I thought to myself, ‘this is a bit late and a bit of a pathetic effort’.

The first smoke appeared at about 3.30pm. It was quite a distance away, and I checked both CFA and DSE websites. The sites reported a ‘small fire at Murrindindi Mill’ with no trucks attending. This notification was not updated for the duration of the afternoon and remained the same up until the power went off at 5.21pm. I was not too concerned as the fire and smoke was clearly a long way off. Nevertheless, I went outside and connected two hoses together to create a long one to connect to the high pressure tap in the front yard and ran it out to the back yard. I wanted to have enough length of hose to get right around the house with the high pressure water if need be. I filled a wheelie bin, wheelbarrows and buckets with water and soaked some hessian bags. I hosed down the back of the house and the outside blinds; the water immediately evaporated. It was stinking hot.

The smoke clouds were building, looking ominous, starting to block out the sky. They were coming a lot closer. Things started looking serious and that we might need to evacuate, so I started looking around, thinking about what to take. I remember looking at our library of over 4,000 books and thinking ‘there is just so much – where do I start, what do I take’, but before I had a chance to progress these thoughts much, or actually do anything, something else would occur, or there was some other interruption. In the end, I think I concluded that we’d be better off making preparations to fight the fire (which I thought would be just ember attack) rather than trying to empty the house of precious things. There was just so much to rescue and so little time to do it. During the course of the afternoon, the CFA siren at the Emergency Services Complex sounded twice. As both soundings were for short periods, I assumed they were a call-out for additional CFA volunteers to attend, which indeed they were. I was still not worried as I simply assumed that any fire would be confined to the bush around Marysville and that the fire itself would not actually enter the town. It was now about 4.45pm.

I again hosed down the canvas blinds over the back windows to both cool the house and protect the blinds; again the water evaporated immediately. I thought 'this is a waste of time'. Jennifer filled the bath and a bucket with water. We were at that time expecting to simply experience some ember attack and would need to hose down the house and put out any sparks. It was about 4.15pm. The town seemed to become very quiet and there were few people around. About an hour had passed as we pottered about doing these things. It was a valuable hour that we could have been packing precious belongings, and/or an hour that we could have been using to evacuate people from the town had we been warned of what was coming our way.

Then came another SES call-out for members to come and assist with evacuation of the Retirement Village. It looked as if things were starting to get a really serious. Jennifer departed to assist with what was termed at that stage a 'precautionary evacuation' just warning people that they should leave town. I decided to stay at home to start gathering some things together. As Jennifer prepared to go, and we were standing at our front gate, the man from the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) came over and asked what was going on. We said that we thought there was a fire coming. He asked what he should do. We replied that he should pack up and go, especially as it was 4.55pm and the VIC was due to close at 5.00pm anyway. He did.<sup>263</sup>

Jennifer went up to the Emergency Services Complex Shed where she parked our very good condition 1996 Nissan Pathfinder which only a few months earlier we had converted to LP Gas. It was later incinerated. Soon after, Jennifer helped to start the CFA generator as the power had gone out and then left with Keith Ray to begin to evacuate people. They went in an SES vehicle (the Nissan Patrol) to the Retirement Village. They spoke to a number of people, including Reg and Mary Kenealy, and told them to leave town; at that time Reg and Mary refused to go, but later left town with minutes to spare, narrowly escaping the fire. Keith and Jennifer then received a call to a Road Crash Rescue (RCR). There was tree across a car and Bev McGearry was trapped inside.

The power went out at 5.21pm. I remember that as I went into my office and wrote it down, deciding to keep a record of events as they unfolded. Shortly after that, (just minutes, as I had only started to walk out to the back door again) I received a mobile

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<sup>263</sup> I met up with this man some weeks later. He apparently went home, packed a few things and left town. He survived.

phone SES call-out for a RCR in town. I asked Jo Hunter (our Marysville SES Deputy Controller) where it was and she said it was in town near the corner of Lyell and Sedgwick Streets. I said I'd attend, and got into my SES gear, and thought it best to take my SES duffle bag with me in case I needed the other stuff in it, like my helmet, – it was just easier to take the whole bag, (which, curiously, is not what I usually did). I went out to my old Toyota Landcruiser, noting that the Service Station was all closed up and deserted. It was about 5.30pm. Just then, Rachael came through, stopping out front of our house, saying that Granton was on fire and that André had stayed behind to “save the house”.<sup>264</sup> She was heading for Alexandra, was quite frantic and wanted to borrow a water bowl for her dog, which I went inside to get and gave to her. She quickly departed.

I was delayed as I thought it best to take the trailer off the Toyota, especially given that it was chock-a-block full of by now quite dried-out Ivy and old fence palings – quite a flammable mix. I was further delayed as some tourists who, seeing my SES uniform, stopped in the Service Station car park to ask me what they should do. I advised them to leave via Buxton and that they should get going now. Taking the trailer off and speaking with the tourists in their car delayed my getting to the SES shed. As I drove up Murchison Street I saw the SES truck coming down the road, turning right into Lyell St. I turned left in behind the SES truck and followed it to the RCR scene.

When we arrived at the RCR the fallen tree had already been removed from the car by volunteers. The tree had essentially landed in Bev McGeary's lap. People had been busy cutting the tree off the car with chainsaws. Bev was trapped in the car by the crushed roof. It was an EA model Ford Falcon and the tree had fallen squarely at right angles across the passenger and driver's seats, basically landing in her lap, with the crushed car roof between her and the tree.

I thought once again ‘there is simply no place for gum trees in urban areas.’ We unloaded the ‘jaws-of-life’ gear out of the truck. We knew there was a fire on its way and time was of the essence. Ian Walters and Keith Ray connected up the hoses and Keith said to start the generator, which Ian did. Unfortunately, the jaws had not yet

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<sup>264</sup> (Not their real names.) Rachael left for Alexandra; André stayed and successfully defended their home, although fighting for his life on a number of occasions and for many long hours. They lost their shed and two cars.

been connected and when I went to connect them up I noticed that the hoses had been connected back-to-front – that is, the loose end of the spool had been connected to the generator and the fixed end of the hose reel was towards the tools and the job. I advised Keith of the problem and he said “doesn’t matter, just connect ’em anyway”. I said to Keith that it did matter as we’d have to hold the whole hose reel up off the ground and the whole thing would be unmanageable. He agreed and he went to disconnect the hoses from the generator. The jaws had still not been connected by this stage; however, the hoses had been pressurized by the generator, although this shouldn’t have really mattered to the connections. We turned off the generator and disconnected the hoses, swung the hose reels around and re-connected them the right way round. The generator was started again as we tried to connect the jaws unit to the hoses, but they simply would not connect. It didn’t matter how hard we pressed the fittings together or what we did, the fittings would only go in half way and not fully into their seated position. We tried over and over again, and tried the spreaders as well, but they wouldn’t connect either. I assumed that the hoses had pressurised because the generator had been started without the full system having been connected first. I didn’t know if this was the real reason or not, but it seemed logical (which I later found out to be correct). I tried to de-pressurise the hoses using my Swiss Army knife, but to no avail. Despite depressing the seal and letting some hydraulic fluid out of the hose, the connectors still would not depress, mesh and connect.<sup>265</sup>

We gave up on the jaws and the machinery and started to concentrate on how else to get Bev out. There was a good deal of urgency, as we all knew the fire was coming. Andrew Woollard (a town resident who is a MICA paramedic) and Dr Lachlan Fraser happened to arrive on the scene and administered first aid. The town ambulance arrived shortly thereafter. We got a crow bar out to see if we could jemmy the roof or door off and away from Bev. I started to think this was becoming a real-life nightmare as we couldn’t get her out of the car and the fire was coming. We decided to see if we could break down the back of the seat and slide Bev out the back – which fortunately we were able to do. Keith was very handy in this regard. We then slid a

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<sup>265</sup> I was later told by Keith that the ‘jaws-of-life’ unit had been tested after the event. It was discovered that as the temperature that evening had been so hot (over 56°C), the hydraulic fluid had indeed expanded and put enough pressure on the connectors to prevent them from being able to be depressed. If I had let more fluid out of the hoses to depressurise them some more then the unit is likely to have worked. I have now also found out there is a special tool available to do just that, although I don’t think the Marysville Unit had one, and we were never trained about this potential problem. (In reality, in 2017, I now know that the system could not be connected because it had already been pressurised by the generator.)

spine board under Bev, and pulled her out from under her shoulders. She was very uncomfortable, but readily slid out of the car. Keith, Jo, Andrew Woollard, myself and some others carried Bev to the Ambulance where a neck brace was applied and she was put in the ambulance and whisked off to Alexandra. Bev was essentially okay; although at that stage the extent of her injuries was unknown. If we had not been able to get Bev out of that car she would have likely died soon after when the fire swept through that part of the town. I saw fellow SES member Mark Peart watching from a distance. He was not in his SES gear and when we were finished he had gone. Speaking with Mark later, he told me that he had thought better of pitching in to help as there were enough people on the scene already, and he decided to get his family out of town instead – for them, a very wise move.

After Bev was out of the car I was asked to find her cats and her handbag and any valuables or other items that should be collected and looked after. I looked through the car as best I could, checking the cat boxes, between the seats, under the things on the seats, and in the glove box. I was unable to find anything. It would appear that her cats, bags and whatever had already been removed and I did not remove anything else from her vehicle. I do not know who had these things.

I again saw Bev and her family at the Alexandra hospital later that night. She could not be evacuated anywhere else as the smoke was too thick and people were unsure as to exactly where the fires were. The extent of her injuries was at that time still apparently unknown. I heard rumours from a number of people that night that Bev had died, so was able to assure people that Bev was indeed alive and stable in Alexandra hospital. Apparently she suffered from shock and a fractured sternum, and that was about the extent of it – she was very lucky. The RCR effort took about 30-40 precious minutes. By now it was about 6.10pm and the wind was blowing very strongly at gale force. Jennifer said to me that she didn't like how things were looking, was worried and wanted to get out of town. At Keith's initiative, he and Jennifer got back into the SES Patrol and headed around to Susan Lucas's home to evacuate her.

From the RCR I returned in my car to the SES shed. I assisted Ian Walters to reverse-park the truck into the SES shed by guiding him in. Soon after, the truck and shed were extensively damaged by the fire. Ian then elected at that point to go home to see

that his family was okay and tend to personal matters. By that time Ian Bates (our SES Controller, who had arrived from Alexandra) and Jo returned in their SES vehicle (the Mitsubishi Triton). I said to Ian and Jo, on at least two occasions, that we needed to start driving through the town with the lights and sirens going telling people to get out of town. They then had a call from Keith Ray asking for Jo Hunter's personal car (a Mitsubishi Magna) to be taken around to Susan Lucas's home to drive Susan away as she could not get into the higher Nissan Patrol. I was asked to take the car to Susan's home, which I did. Dan and Marie Walsh were standing around outside Susan's property asking what was going on and what they should do. We told them that we were evacuating Susan because the fire was coming. Keith clearly told them to get out of town, but they paid little attention to his instruction and continued to stand around, looking rather bewildered.<sup>266</sup> After we got Susan into Jo's car, which was an effort in itself, I then drove it around the corner to the Cumberland Resort. I was told that it was supposed to be the emergency assembly point for the town but there was no one there – it was deserted. Ian and Jo, then Keith and Jennifer arrived in their SES vehicles at the Cumberland Resort. Jo had established that the Cumberland was deserted and seemed quite annoyed that everyone had gone. We all departed from the Cumberland and went back to the SES shed. Jo Hunter drove her car back to the SES shed with Susan Lucas in the front seat, I returned to the SES shed in the Triton with Ian Bates, and Jennifer and Keith departed in the Nissan Patrol, also going back to the SES shed.

Back at the shed it became a matter of what to do with Susan. It was agreed that she couldn't go down to Gallipoli Park (where we had heard that people were gathering), and that she would need to be taken to Alexandra Hospital. Keith and Jennifer had walked back to the Patrol. Ian and Jo wanted me to take Susan to Alexandra but I said it shouldn't be me as I could be needed in town (with my 4WD full of useful tools) and may need to go back home to protect the house and retrieve belongings. (I was also aware that Jennifer was worried and wanted to get out of town, but I did not mention that.) After a quick discussion it was agreed that it should be Jennifer. Ian Bates said we'd better get Keith on the radio and get Jennifer back to the shed to drive Jo's car to Alexandra, so Ian called up Keith on the radio and asked for Jennifer

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<sup>266</sup> Having survived the fire-front by sheltering in the Cumberland Resort, Dan returned to their home to put out spot fires. The Resort later caught fire and his wife, Marie, along with David and Kate Whittington, who were all still sheltering in the Resort, perished. Their deaths were entirely preventable and should never have happened.

to come back over and take Susan to Alexandra. This they did, and Jennifer headed off – I think she was very glad to go. Jennifer’s car was left behind and incinerated soon after. By now it was about 6.25pm.

Someone then drove into the Emergency Services Complex car park and said “there’s about 200 people down at Gallipoli Park – you’d better get them out of there”. Ian Bates and I both said at about the same time that we’d better find some police to see what to do about getting them out of there. Amazingly, just then a police car drove into the Emergency Services Complex. I recall that it was one of the brightly coloured orange Highway Patrol cars. I walked up to the driver’s side window and the policeman asked “What’s going on here?” I advised him we were getting people out of town and that we’d been told that there were about 200 people down on the Gallipoli Park Oval who needed to be evacuated and told to get out of town. Ian came over and essentially repeated the same thing. We asked them to go to Gallipoli Park Oval and get the people going, which they did. By that time we were quite sure that the fire was on its way and going to come into the town. The police left for Gallipoli Park Oval and were later feted as ‘the heroes who saved 200 people in Marysville’ – meanwhile, not one mention of the work of the SES members who told them to go down there and do the job in the first place. This has left a very sour taste in my mouth.<sup>267</sup>

It was agreed that Jo Hunter, Ian Bates and Keith Ray would take the SES vehicles and continue trying to evacuate people as it was now clear that entry of a major fire into the town area was imminent. As I had my vehicle with me, Ian suggested that I should go back home, do whatever I had to do, and “get out of town”. Keith reiterated that view, so I headed home. It was now about 6.35pm.

### **The Evening:**

I went back home and parked in the Service Station car park next to our house. I thought I’d better get some things out of the house. I didn’t feel in any particular

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<sup>267</sup> Later the police involved apparently came under a good deal of criticism for evacuating the people from the oval as others (who were not even in Marysville at the time) said that it was too dangerous to leave town by road at that stage. This is criticism which I cannot support. It was a very sensible and rational course of action to take given that we knew at the time the Buxton Road was still open and the fire was not yet there. I believe that anyone in the same situation would have done exactly the same thing, as it was clearly more dangerous to have so many people in such a small space with an imminent (and what turned out to be) massive firestorm approaching.

hurry, and was not at all panicked, thinking that I was not yet in any great danger.<sup>268</sup> Little did I know that parts of the town were already on fire.

I knew that the old Toyota had very little fuel in it and might not get me very far if I needed to do a lot of travelling, so I went under the house (through the large gap in the fence we had made earlier that morning) to get a 20-litre jerrycan of diesel and poured that into the car. I took that can back and got a second 20-litre drum I had, and emptied that into the car as well. I put the drum back under the house, and locked the padlocks on the padbolts (as was my custom). I also went over to the garage doors and for a moment thought about getting my tool bag from the shed, and some other tools as well, but then didn't think that I would need them (as I already had a set in the car) or that I had enough time, so I locked both garage doors. I also locked my Honda Brushcutter in the garage as I didn't want people stealing things I'd left lying around if I was a while getting back. Of course, all of these things were soon completely destroyed.

I then walked back around to the front of the property as the back door was locked. Someone drove past in a car yelling out "The top of the town's on fire! The top of the town's on fire!" as he rapidly sped by on his way out of town. There were accounts from a number of people of a 'fireball' seen leaping from the top of Mt Gordon across the valley and landing in the forest at the top of Marysville (above the Anglican Church on the east side of the town).

I could see up to the top right (the south-west) of the town that there must have been houses on fire because of the density and location of the smoke. It was clearly arising from within the town area up in the vicinity of Kings Road (to the west). I could hear a very loud roar which seemed to be gaining in intensity. I looked west up the main street (Murchison St.) towards Melbourne. What I saw quite surprised me. At the top of the town, probably just at the entry point to town, in the vicinity of the last bend as one drives into the outskirts of the township, there was a 350-400 ft high wall of churning, swirling almost bubbling grey-black cloud. It was whiter towards the top, and at the base was a wide bright red-orange glow, which was probably about 150-160 foot high in itself – it was clearly visible. The sky had gone quite dark. There was curiously a very eerie stillness in the midst of all the noise – if that makes any sense at

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<sup>268</sup> In retrospect, I now think that my thought processes were slowing down and time seemed to be moving very slowly, whereas of course the opposite was true – things were developing very rapidly.

all. Small flaming branches, large pieces of burning bark and embers were falling out of the sky. There was ash falling everywhere as well. I was quite surprised at how everything had suddenly, and so very quickly, turned so very ugly.

Some cars were still filing out of Pack Road into Murchison Street in a slow, steady but orderly and unhurried flow from Gallipoli Park Oval. All I could see was their headlights in what seemed to be a murky yellow thick pea-soup fog which had come down in minutes. It was getting harder to breathe as the oxygen was being sucked out of the air and my eyes were starting to sting. I quite pointedly noticed these effects and, along with the other indicators, thought, 'this can't be good'. I think at that point I realized that I wouldn't be able to do much with the garden hose and buckets, especially if I couldn't breathe or see, and that I'd better get out of the place. I recall wondering at the time why it was that we had not been issued with SES goggles for eye protection, or masks to breathe with.

I went in the front gate, unlocked the front door and went into the house. It was now pitch-black dark inside and I could hardly see a thing. I knew where I had a torch kept (for the many black-outs we always seemed to experience in Marysville) and went to get it. I turned it on and saw Jack, our Maltese-Lhasa Apso cross dog. He was looking quite frantic and was jumping around excitedly. I thought I'd better get him out of the house as things seemed to be getting quite serious. I looked about and saw his yellow food bowl, and thought he'd need that. I then thought he'd need some water, so got a bottle of water out of the freezer where Jennifer had put a few earlier in the day. I thought I'd better get some drink for me too, and opened the fridge and grabbed a large 2-litre bottle of Fanta. I then thought I needed something to put them in, so grabbed an Officeworks bag that was full of the work tea-towels that Jennifer had washed and packed to return to work on Monday. I up-ended it on the floor and put the dogs bowl, water bottle and Fanta in it. Using the torch I carried the dog and the bag out the front and put them in the back of the Toyota. By now the smoke was very thick. There were still a few cars departing from town, but not as many as before. I returned to the front of the house and considered whether or not to go back in and start getting some of our possessions, but then thought better of it and decided to leave. I locked the front door and fully expected to be back a short while later after the fire-front had passed. I didn't expect that I'd eventually be going all the way to Alexandra, being chased by the fire. I didn't get anything else from the house,

thinking that the house would be alright (being in the middle of the town) and that time seemed to be running short and I needed to get going. I can honestly say that I was not frightened, but just knew that it was probably better not to hang around, especially as I had no goggles or breathing mask available.

As I went back to the car I heard a tremendous noise behind me which sounded like about half a dozen jumbo-jets taking off – it was an incredibly loud, heavy, concentrated and dense noise. I again looked up the main street and could see the towering plume of greyish-black swirling churning smoke about 3-400 feet high. At the base of this smoke was a huge bright orange-red band which was about 150 feet high. I again thought to myself ‘that can’t be good’. I took one last look around, looked at the trailer, considered putting it back on the car, but looked at all the brush stacked up inside it, decided it would be too hazardous as it was, and thought ‘that should be OK, it’s fairly out in the open’; it was later burnt. I got in the car and headed out of town. I didn’t see any people in the street. It must have now been about 6.50pm. By now I believe that the fire-front was already entering the western town precinct. People on that side of the town were already dead, or imminently about to die; I understand that the fire arrived in central Marysville at about 6.55-7.00pm.

I had only turned on to the Buxton Rd. past the roundabout and driven about 500 metres when I realised that I didn’t have my wallet or my wedding ring. I thought for a minute about going back for them but looking back across to the centre of town there was nothing but black smoke, so I thought better of it. I thought I’d be back in a few hours anyway, and all being well, I’d get them then. I still didn’t think that our house would burn down. I travelled down to the Golf Course Car Park where there were quite a few people gathered. I stopped by the roadside, not actually driving into the car park. Keith was there too, and was telling people to get going. There were still a few cars coming out of Marysville. A panic-stricken woman pulled in, saying that her husband was supposed to be following behind her on his motorbike, but he wasn’t there.<sup>269</sup> She asked if she could wait for a minute. I said okay. The smoke was getting thicker by the minute. The woman’s husband did not show up, and we told her to go on to Buxton and wait there. There was a Fallons bus there too, with the driver and one woman on board. I was impressed that he said he’d left his own car behind and was taking the bus out instead to save it; his own car was later burnt. He was waiting

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<sup>269</sup> Later identified as Jennifer and John Carpenter. (John survived the fire but died of cancer in 2016.)

for someone as well, but his female passenger was clearly very keen to get going. We told him to go to Buxton as well. As we had cleared everyone from the Golf Club Car Park, and as I was driving away, I saw Leigh Jowett pull into the car park and stop. I thought to myself, 'what the hell is he doing' but by that time my vehicle was moving and I was on my way.<sup>270</sup> I had been at the Golf Club Car Park for about 8-10 minutes.

I followed Peter Dickenson down the road a short distance and he turned into his 'Crystal Journey' property. I was then following someone towing a tandem trailer that had a huge tree branch caught up underneath it. It had jacked the whole trailer up on its side with the inboard wheels seemingly right off the ground. He was slowing up the traffic heading for Buxton and eventually pulled over to clear the log jam. I later found out that he could not clear the jammed log and took the trailer off and left it by the side of the road, as it was still there when we visited Marysville the following Saturday.

I pulled up on the left side of the Maroondah Highway just down the north end from the Buxton General Store next to Keith's SES Nissan Patrol. We chatted for a minute and Keith gave me one of the SES portable radios which proved most useful for the rest of the evening until the battery went dead later that night. One of the policemen from Eildon asked Keith to go and see if a certain woman was home down Paradise Plains Road. Keith was reluctant to do so, but did anyway and eventually came back and reported that she was not there.

At the request of the police, I performed traffic duty at the Buxton-Marysville intersection making sure that the traffic kept moving, and answering any questions that people had as best could. At one point I was very pleased to see about half a dozen CFA fire trucks race past, lights flashing, down the Maroondah Highway towards Narbethong. They were from Mansfield, Tolmie, Merrijig, Boorolite, Mt Buller and such. Curiously, about five minutes later some of them came racing back out again, straight back up the highway from whence they came. I thought 'that can't be good – it must be a bit wild down there.' The woman from the golf club was still there for a while, waiting for her husband to arrive on his motorbike. As far as I

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<sup>270</sup> I later discovered that Leigh sheltered at the Golf Course Club House for a short while and then went back to his house to protect it from burning down, which he successfully did. The Golf Course Club House did not burn down either.

know, he never did.<sup>271</sup> After a while we told her she would need to head off to Alexandra as the fire was approaching; she was clearly very upset.

Another woman came through on the Maroondah Highway from Narbethong. She stopped and said to me with a tear-stained and distressed look on her face, “I’m from the Berry Farm – it’s gone” and then quickly drove on. A little later Jenny Worcester from the Alpaca Farm came through in her car. She stopped and was quite frantic, and in tears said that Brian (her husband) had “stayed to save the house”, and she was “worried sick about him”, but she had to go herself – she couldn’t stay. She asked me to “watch out for him”. In reality, there was little I could do.<sup>272</sup>

The Fallons bus had stopped in Buxton as well, but after a short while headed off to Alexandra. By this time SES member Ian Walters was in his car at Buxton as well. An SES call-out notification of a tree down on Tarnpir Road, Narbethong, had been received at 6.42pm. No-one attended that callout.

I had been at the Buxton intersection for about 10 minutes (around 7.15pm) and our friend David Littlejohn came through in his work car. It was covered in soot, and so was he. He was filthy, frantic and very excited. He said he’d just had a narrow escape and was only just able to get out of town. He said the Buxton Road was blocked with a tree across it and to get out of town past it he and a DSE fire truck had to drive across a paddock, through the Caravan Park fence, through the Caravan Park, and crash out through the fence again to get back on to the road. He reported that the town was well and truly on fire.

At about the same time, Ian Bates and Jo Hunter arrived from down the Marysville-Buxton Rd in the SES Triton. They had been checking some of the back roads and homes between Marysville and Buxton. Keith Ray was also back on the highway from his evacuation activities around Buxton, and said that as far as he could tell, just about everyone who was going to go had gone.

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<sup>271</sup> I later heard that her husband (John Carpenter) had not been able to get the motorbike started and had run down Murchison Street, almost a kilometre – he lived opposite the Littlejohn’s at the top end of town – and sheltered in the Steavenson River under the small timber footbridge adjacent to the Caravan Park. He survived by splashing himself, and the bridge which kept catching alight, with water.

<sup>272</sup> Brian survived and managed to save the house, although some sheds and all fences were burnt. All the alpacas survived.

A police vehicle had shown up from Marysville with Woods Point's Leading Senior Constable Ken Dwight (well known to me from my Woods Point involvements) in the passenger seat. He and the driver were rather sooty, and had goggles with them. I again thought to myself, 'now why haven't we got some of those?' (We had not been issued with any fire protection goggles – I hadn't even seen them before.) We chatted for a while, with Ken in his usual laconic, laid-back style, about the fact they had escorted all of the people off the Gallipoli Park Oval. The flow of traffic seemed to have stopped and after a while it was agreed that the police would leave, and so would we, so there was little left to do but head back to my car and drive off to Alexandra.

I was a bit disappointed to be leaving as I would have liked to have stayed around to do more, but there didn't really seem to be much more that could be done – there was no-one around by this time, and I was basically instructed by Ian Bates and Keith Ray to go, so to that extent I 'obeyed orders'. I checked on Jack (the dog) and he was not happy, lying on the back seat prostrate and panting in the smoke; I wondered if he would make it. I wondered what was happening in Marysville, and wished I was still there. Time seemed to travel sometimes faster and then slower than it really was – it is very difficult to ascertain what was happening when. The lack of any SES close-group debrief after the fires of those who took part in the events of the day has made such recollections all the more difficult. I estimate I was at the Buxton intersection for about a bit over half an hour. I think by now it was about 7.40pm.

### **Night-time:**

The drive to Alexandra was constant and for a fair while I was travelling alone and at about 80-90 km/h. At Taggerty I was then behind some cars which were behind a fire truck also heading to Alexandra so the speed was reduced to about 60-70 km/h. The smoke was very thick but visibility to drive was still okay. It was difficult to breathe. I arrived in Alexandra soon after 8.00pm. It was now pitch-black dark and Alexandra was blacked-out (no power) and the smoke was very thick; it was quite difficult to breathe and was stinging my eyes. I wanted to get out of it, but there was simply nowhere to go. I saw Ian Walters in his car at the Alexandra Secondary College where lots of people were gathering. (I had heard at Buxton that the Secondary

College was the Evacuation Point). We were told we should go to the Alexandra SES shed but I had no idea where it was. Ian said I should follow him, which I did.

Poor Jack was struggling to breathe and I gave him more water, comforted him, talked to him, and told him to 'hang in there little buddy'. He was obviously quite distressed and I was very concerned that he was going to die. At the Alexandra SES shed I was looking for Jennifer and was advised that she was not there and most likely up at the hospital. I asked for directions and headed up there. It was very hard to see where to go as there were no street lights due to the black out, but I eventually found it. The smoke was so thick it was hard to see anything much at all. I arrived at the hospital at about 8.20pm.

The hospital had power from its emergency generator set. That was comforting. It was nevertheless quite smoky and we were requested to keep the doors shut. I first found myself in Accident and Emergency where I was surprised to see Bev McGearry lying on a trolley. An older short woman (I think Bev's mother) enquired about the whereabouts of Bev's handbag and purse. As the person delegated to search and empty Bev's car before we left the scene I could assure her that there was nothing of that nature left in Bev's car, so someone must have the items; we in the SES did not have them. I asked a nurse about Jennifer and was told she was with Susan Lucas.

I went looking and found Susan Lucas sitting up in bed as bright as a button, being well looked after. I am pleased to know that if we had not retrieved her from her house she would have, without a shadow of a doubt, perished in the fire. When I later learned that her house was destroyed I knew that we had directly saved her life, as she was virtually immobile. Who else would have thought to go and get Susan, and she owes her life to Keith Ray's forethought to go and collect her.

Jennifer was not with Susan, and I found her in the kitchen listening to the radio. We hugged and talked about what was happening. I then rang Mum at about 8.30pm to let her know we were okay. We stayed at the hospital for a while. A young orderly made us a sandwich and a cup of tea, for which we were most grateful. One of the nurses then told us we could stay the night with her mother if we needed to. We thanked her kindly and she said she'd let her mother know we were coming, and gave us directions to her house.

Many injured people with burns and smoke inhalation and eye problems were coming into the hospital and we thought we were a bit in the way so decided to go back to the Alexandra SES shed to see if we could do anything. We left the hospital at about 9.15pm, went to the Alexandra SES and CFA facility and stayed there for about two hours, listening to the reports; it didn't sound good, but there wasn't anything we could do. People were talking about the need to evacuate Alexandra as the fire was supposedly heading towards Taggerty showing no signs of slowing (the fire was halted later that night in paddocks and farmland around Taggerty by CFA crews and farmers). We were told we'd be called if we were needed and to go and find somewhere to stay the night and get some rest.

It finally dawned on me that we would actually need to stay the night at Alexandra and that we would not be going back to Marysville. I wondered if we'd be able to go back down to Marysville in the morning. We still had no idea of how bad it had been. I prayed that night that our place would be spared, but that if it wasn't that we'd be able to cope with it all. We decided to see if we could find the nurse's mother's unit, so headed off back towards the hospital. We found the unit on the main Alexandra-Eildon Rd. and pulled up outside. It was now about 11.30pm. The lady opened her front door and was there waiting for us in her dressing gown. We were filthy and exhausted, realizing that we basically had nothing but the clothes in which we stood. We had something to eat and watched the TV news. There was nothing on about Marysville. We both had a shower and finally got to bed at about 12.45am, but didn't sleep much at all. It was still exceptionally hot.

### **Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2009:**

We got up at about 8.30am, had a lovely breakfast, packed and went into town to have a look around and see if we could get a phone charger and some clothes. Jennifer said "let's get a cup of coffee" I said "we can't". Again she said "let's get a cup of coffee". I again said "we can't". She said "why not" and I said "we haven't got any money" and of course we didn't. I'd left my wallet on my chest of drawers and Jennifer had left hers in her SES bag which was in the SES shed at Marysville, and we didn't know at that stage if it had survived or not (it did). We had no money at all, and no access to any money by way of cards.

We went to the Alexandra SES facility. We had not been there long when Jo Hunter and Ian Bates walked in, having just returned from Marysville. Jo Hunter was absolutely as white as a sheet and Ian also looked haggard and as if he had seen a ghost. Both were clearly quite shocked by what they had seen. I was nevertheless quite annoyed that we had not been contacted and given the opportunity to return to Marysville as well. Jo confirmed that our house and garage were destroyed, along with the rest of the town. I was rather shocked to hear that the town was essentially gone. We stayed around for a while and later went back into Alexandra where we bumped into many Marysville people, one of whom lent us some money. We also went to the Alexandra Tandy shop to see if we could get a phone charger, as my mobile phone battery had gone flat. The man in the shop just gave me the charger for nothing.<sup>273</sup> After a while we decided that there was not much left to do in Alexandra but to go and pick up Jack from the lady's unit and head back to Melbourne, which we did via Yea and Seymour, as the Maroondah and Melba Highways were closed. The Hume Highway had only just been reopened that afternoon. We were surprised at the burnt country and devastation that we saw as we travelled through the Kilmore region.

#### **Aftermath:**

It is worth noting that if the fire at Murrindindi Mill had not been deliberately lit, none of the above would have happened. All those who died would still be alive today and the sleepy town of Marysville would still exist in the way that it always has.<sup>274</sup> Two days after the fire I woke up in the middle of the night having a dream that I was in the middle of a Tsunami. I could see it coming and people were running everywhere. I managed to find somewhere to hide and the Tsunami rolled over the top of me. I was alive, but all those around me were killed. Also, about nine days after the fire I heard the sound of a loud jet engine overhead and it gave me quite a shiver – it was not a pleasant sound to hear.

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<sup>273</sup> When I went back some weeks later to pay for the phone charger, the man refused to accept any money. I was amazed at, and very thankful for, the generosity of the people of Alexandra in the days and weeks following the fires.

<sup>274</sup> At the time of writing it was being stated by the police that the Murrindindi Mill fire had been deliberately lit. It was later determined that the fire had started because of a broken power line that contacted a wire fence causing sparks to fall to the ground. Nevertheless, the same sentiments still apply.

## Appendix H

### Les and Jenny Dovaston's Transcript of their Roadblock Experience

(Les and Jenny and their son Glen operated the Marysville Trout and Salmon Ponds. The business was almost entirely destroyed by the fires; however, their stocks of about 100,000 fish required aerators to oxygenate the water to prevent them from dying. Fuel was required to run generators to operate the oxygenators, so they tried to get to Healesville to buy fuel. This is their story.)

David: What was the situation you mentioned to me about going down to Healesville to get some fuel for the fish?

Les: Yes, well...

David: For the pump?

Les: We decided on Monday, me and Glen,<sup>275</sup> to go and get some fuel. We were running out of diesel for the generators for the paddles, the aerators and he decided to go to Alexandra because there's no power – well, the nearest power was either Healesville or probably Taggerty. There was none at Buxton because it was all cut off, and so he – there's nothing – I don't think – there's no bowsers at Taggerty so he would have had to go to Alexandra anyway, so there's a roadblock there somewhere... I don't know, probably, I'd say, it'd be this side of Taggerty, and Glen said he wanted to go in and get some diesel and the cop said, "Yes, alright." And Glen said, "I want to come back," and he said, "Yes, that'll be alright," but when he came back with the fuel the guy, the same policeman said, "No. You're not allowed back in there," so cut him out. So I don't know how we found out...

Jenny: About what?<sup>276</sup>

Les: That he was locked out.

Jenny: I don't know, either.

Les: But anyway, Tuesday...

David: So he just didn't come back?

Les: No.

Jenny: No.

Les: He was trying to find a way in.

Jenny: So that may have saved some of the fish but of course it was too late when he got...

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<sup>275</sup> Glen is Jenny & Les's son who was at that time a partner with them in the fish farm business. He now lives in Western Australia.

<sup>276</sup> At the time of the interview Jenny was beginning to show signs of dementia. By August 2017, Jenny had succumbed to its effects, now having advanced dementia. Despite being friends for many years, Jenny no longer recognises me and has recently been admitted to full-time care in a nursing home.

- Les: Then Tuesday, I thought I'll go down to Healesville, I'll get in touch with Leanne<sup>277</sup> when I get down there because there's no phones there, nothing here and get her to pass...
- Jenny: Oh, yes. This was a big mistake.
- Les: ...jerrycans over the barricades.
- Jenny: The roadblock at Healesville.
- Les: Roadblock. So I started to do this, head to Healesville for fuel, and the cop said, "Oh, go down and get it and I'll let you back in," and I planned not to do that but he was such a nice guy that I thought, oh well, he sounded genuine, you know? So we went down and got the fuel and come back and he'd gone and they said, "No. You're not allowed in there," back up here, so Wednesday...
- Jenny: Yes, Wednesday.
- Les: We kept going up to the roadblock each day, hoping the road would be open because on the Wednesday there's a little – I don't know when it started. It might have started Tuesday, a fire near Healesville. It was supposed to have been a lightning strike and it went across – eventually went across Maroondah Highway and around Maroondah Dam and I think part of – I don't know whether that was the same fire. I think that was a different fire than Chum Creek.
- Jenny: Yes, it was. Yes.
- Les: So on the Wednesday they were having a meeting down at the Memo<sup>278</sup> Hall about what roads were open and what were closed. So we went down there, there was a lot of people, the Memo Hall was full. 100 people – more, 200. Anyway, I said to Leanne, "Leanne, we'll grab the cop when he gets off the stage." – Oh, he said, "Any questions?" I put me hand up and he ignored me and anyway, he got off the stage and Leanne sort of grabbed him and...
- Jenny: This was on the Tuesday.
- Les: On the Tuesday was it? Yes, on the Tuesday, and I caught up with him and I said what had happened and he said – we were looking through the double doors at the front of the Memo Hall. He said, "That's my car there. If you're behind it..."
- Jenny: In two minutes.
- Les: "Two minutes, I'll take you through," he said. I'm trying to think of his name.
- Jenny: It's too hard to think about his name.
- Les: Anyway, we followed him up and then drove through the roadblock. We drove up to where the fire crossed the road the day earlier and someone in green had a

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<sup>277</sup> Leanne is Jenny & Les's daughter who, after the fires, moved to the fish farm after their son, Glen, had left the business. Leanne subsequently drowned in February, 2011, in an accident on the farm when a ride-on mower she was operating fell into a dam, pinning her underneath. This proved a crushing blow to the family – one from which they have never recovered.

<sup>278</sup> The Healesville Memorial Club Hall.

clipboard and we stopped and y'know, we spoke to him and he said, "Leave it go for an hour or two and the smoke'd clear by then, and then go up." So we sat inside the roadblock for a couple of hours and some people that were inside the roadblock that owned a house invited us in for a cup of tea and some lunch.

So we went in there and then we eventually came out sort-of... we'll take off. But in the meantime we were in the house having a cuppa the cop car come up apparently and stopped up near where the fire went across the road. So we drove up and I saw the cop car there and I thought I better stop and see what we're doing. Anyway, I went to the driver's side and the bloke – I could see him pointing that way to the bloke on the other side of the car – so I walked around... he put the window down...

Jenny: He had dark glass...

Les: They had...

Jenny: All dark windows you couldn't see...

Les: They had the motor running with the air conditioner going.

Jenny: Oh, right. Yes, yes.

Les: So they left the window down and then they – they're into me about running the roadblock.

Jenny: Yes they accused us of...

Les: "Get out of here immediately" and I said what the story was, how we got in there and they wouldn't take any notice of it. \*\*\*\*\*<sup>279</sup>, Senior Constable – Superintendent, \*\*\*\*\*. I'll never forget his name. So driving back out I stopped and I got some sandwiches out of the back of the car. I was starving by this time and the adrenalin was sort of knocked out of us by then and the people give us – for a little lunch. Anyway the cop car came up alongside me.

Jenny: Really quickly. He must have been checking up on us.

Les: Put the brakes on and skid to a sort of stop and...

Jenny: Pulled our car – the keys out of the ignition.

Les: He put his hand in and took me car keys and they were going to take me to jail. I said, "Take me to jail. I'm stuffed anyway. I want to have a sleep" and...

Jenny: I was in a...

Les: Then Jenny...

Jenny: – State of...

Les: I've never seen her so upset in my life.

Jenny: It was terrible.

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<sup>279</sup> The policeman's name has been omitted.

Les: She grabs the cop and he sort of – anyway, he gave her back the keys and we went down the roadblock and they let us out and this, Superintendent \*\*\*\*\* said to the bloke on the roadblock, “Don’t ever let this person past this point ever again.”

Jenny: Oh, we were treated like criminals.

Les: Every time I go past that point I thought, how could that bloke say that? That ‘never again am I allowed past this point?’ So I was that annoyed. Oh, there was – a car come down. That’s right. A car come down while we were sitting there and I stopped him and I said, “Where’d you come from?” “Oh,” he said, “Oh, Narbethong.” I said, “What’s the road like?” he said, “Oh, it’s alright” and we took off and anyway we were kicked out and I – so what happened then? We – I went home, to our other place at Healesville, and on the Tuesday night we had to evacuate that place because at that stage, Marysville – Healesville was going to catch on fire but it wasn’t the same fire as this fire up here. It was a different fire. It was started on the Tuesday or something or the Monday. So we packed everything up and off... Where did we go?

Jenny: No, we didn’t go anywhere, because Glen rang...

Les: Oh, we thought stuff it, no, we’ll...

Jenny: Glen rang the next day on the Wednesday to say that they’d had...

Les: We could see the flames and we thought, oh, we’ll stay. It might not come here anyway, and anyway, he rang and said – no – I know. On the Tuesday, I rang the Minister of Agriculture, [*Joe*] Helper.

Jenny: Oh, you’ll love this one.

Les: I thought he should be able to give me a hand back in. Surely! To look after the fish... and I rang the office – his office, and I actually got onto him and I told him roughly the story and he said, “Oh, I can’t help you.” I said, “Well, firstly you want to change your name.” So I hung up on him and I thought, oh well, who else? I thought the EPA. They’re on our back all the bloody time. I’ll see – they should have some teeth, and I rang them up in Wangaratta or somewhere, their head office up there that we deal with, and he said, “Hang on.” So I was on the phone for ten minutes and he come back and I said, “What? Did you have your bloody morning tea or something?” He said, “No. I was just putting on – you on the internet as potential polluters.”

David: Potential polluters?

Les: I said, “You arsehole,” then I hung up. I thought well that’s –

David: What for? Potential polluters from dead fish...?

Les: Yes. Well, I said to him, I said, “Well, if we don’t get up there, you’re going to have heaps of dead fish that are going to upset the stream,” and I –

Jenny: That was about the end of the straw, that one.

Les: – Then I sort of give up worrying about these people – all these people and I thought, well, I'll get a jerrycan and I'll carry it up on my bloody back. So I got to the roadblock and I thought I'd walk through the farm and go – come out and walk up. I thought, shit, do you reckon? I – I'm thinking to myself a jerrycan would get bloody heavy after... Anyway, did I start to do it?

Jenny: No.

Les: I thought of it. Anyway, Glen rang up and he said he got onto a guy at the Murrindindi Shire – at that stage he was the health inspector or the –

Jenny: – The health inspector, that's right, yes.

Les: He actually took Glen through the roadblock.

David: So how many days was that after you'd actually initially gone out before somebody got back here?

Les: It was about Thursday.

Jenny: But that – and that was from the same – who took Glen back in.

Les: Yes, well, that's right. The bloke who was at the Shire, I – if I saw his name I'd know it – had to come – he actually brought him to the farm, or escorted him. So Glen rang and said that if I wanted to come up, to ring him and he'll escort me in too.

Jenny: Which he did.

Les: Which he did, but we had to then go. We went to Yarra Glen so I got some fuel at Yarra Glen and a guy come – was coming for fuel, and I said, "Where'd you come from?" and he said, "Yea," I said, "What's the road like?" he said, "Oh, well I just drove down." That's what he said and so we drove up, got up to Mount Slide and there's a roadblock on. I said, "I'm going to Alexandra." They said, "It's closed." So I went – I said, "Do you mean to tell me I've come right from Yarra Glen and up here to tell me it's closed? So I've got to go right back down there again?" So then I had to go right around Sydney Road and Tallarook and back to Yea that way.

David: That's the Hume Highway?

Les: Yes.

David: Bloody hell. Yes...

Les: So we got to Alexandra.

Jenny: We eventually got there.

Les: The guy – and remember I had all this fuel on, and, oh shit, it was hot.

Jenny: It was hot.

Les: We got to Alexandra and the guy was waiting for us.

Jenny: Dragged us back.

Les: But by that time the fish were dead. It was wall to wall.

David: So how many – about how many dead fish?

Les: Oh, ... ten tonne.

Jenny: I don't know. It's hard to say.

David: So roughly how many would that have been do you reckon?

Jenny: There wasn't many alive – there wasn't any alive I don't think.

Les: How many would that be – it took three of us three weeks to net them and bury them.

David: Three weeks to net them and bury them?

Les: By two days they were rotten. In two days. So there were maggots and anyway the guy which he had the pine mill down here...

David: Oh, yes.

Jenny: You haven't heard this part... bit of it, have you?

David: I don't know. Tell me.

Jenny: This is really amazing, this is.

Les: His son...

Jenny: Was in South Australia...

Les: Was working in Perth or somewhere.

Jenny: South Australia...

Les: So as soon as the fire happened he came over to give his father a hand to sort things out. So the Coroner hadn't closed it down there because no one had died down that area. So he – we went to the Black Spur pub for a meal and his father was there and he was there and he said to Jenny – he'd be 30 wouldn't he?

Jenny: Oh, yes, easily 30.

Les: He said, "I know you. You taught me religious education at the Healesville State School."

Jenny: I know.

Les: But when he was in bubs.

Jenny: Yes, grade three.

Les: Grade – yes. This bloke all of a sudden – oh good.

Jenny: He was like a long-lost friend.

Les: He said, "What's happening? Can I give you a hand with something?" I said, "Oh, we've got heaps of –"

Jenny: – Dead fish...

Les: " – fish to get rid of." We smelt like a dead fish for months after, we did. You know, it got in under your fingernails... and he came up, he started to do it and he vomited his heart out and said, "I can't do that." So we got a lot of ash – pine bark off the mill over time before the fire and we had piles of it around the place and there was smoulder, and most of it was smouldering... and we said, oh, we've got

to compost the fish, we can't bury them. That's what the EPA say that we've got to do and we've got an old Bob Cat and it takes forever to sort of cart a bucket to put down to compost the fish and so it – he had a big – I don't know, it's a four wheel tractor thing, but it had a bucket on the front that had about three metres, that would hold about three metres of sawdust and so he thought, oh well, I'd bring that up and he sat on Maroondah Highway for an hour and a low loader went past. So he stopped and said, "Any chance of getting a hitch-hike just up to the farm?" The bloke said, "Oh, yes." So he brought it up and he had a heap of trouble with the bloody police [*at the roadblock*] out here and anyway...

David: Even though the driveway to the property was inside the roadblock?

Les: Yes. Yes.

David: Just on – because I remember where the roadblock was. It was just up from your driveway.

Les: Yes.

David: They wouldn't let him unload it and bring it in?

Les: Well...

Jenny: Well, they got in...

Les: Then he said, "Well, we'll cut the fence up a bit further then," and they said, "Oh." Anyway he came in and he dumped the machine here and took off, the low-loader took off again and he carted all this stuff and put it all in a big heap where we composted the fish.

Jenny: It would have taken days and days and days to shift.

Les: He left it here and then it was here a week, I suppose, and his father wanted to clean up a bit of mess down there, so he – on the side of the road, hitch-hiked another, and it's the same bloke in the low-loader so he finished up coming up and he said, "Oh, I wasn't game to drive it down the hill, this bloody big machine," because, he said, "I don't know; the brakes aren't that good on it." So he took it back down. So that guy give us a hand.

David: So was it 50,000 fish, 100,000 fish, 200,000 fish? How many?

Les: Oh, well, I don't know. Yes, I suppose you'd say 100,000 as a round figure.

David: That just amazes me. One of the most amazing stories of this whole thing, and I probably want to use it in what I write. Just as the tragic effect, the ridiculous collateral damage effect of this stupid roadblock situation that they had.

Les: Well, we were here. It's not as though we weren't here, and the roadblock could have been another kilometre down the road.

Jenny: Oh yes...

Les: Because there's no one – well, they didn't know whether – that we had the cops come out here and went around and picked up every sheet of tin and looked

underneath it. They were here for a week going around picking up bloody bits of tin and looking under –

David: What were they looking for?

Les: Bodies!

David: On your place?

Les: Yes.

David: But there was nobody missing?

Les: In Marysville there was. So they reckon that the person could have run.

David: Up here?

Les: Well, they said, you know, someone could have been in their house and all of a sudden it caught on fire, they run next door, he was on fire so they got in someone else's car and burnt to death.

David: Despite the fact that there was no evidence of that whatsoever?

Les: Well...

\* \* \* \* \*

## Statistics of Marysville Businesses – as at August 2017

### Marysville Businesses Pre-fire:<sup>280</sup>

#	Business Name:	Status:
1	<i>Action Ski Hire</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
2	<i>Chaffcutters Antiques</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
3	<i>Country Touch</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
4	<i>Corner Cupboard Café</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
5	<i>Cross Country Ski Hire</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
6	<i>Crossways Restaurant</i>	survived fire & now closed and For Sale
7	<i>Flirtatious</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
8	<i>Fraga's Café</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating (recently sold)
9	<i>Fruit Salad Farm</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (owners died in fires)
10	<i>Hidden Talent Craft Shop</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (relocated to Yarra Glen)
11	<i>Hugo &amp; Friends</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
12	<i>Indij Art</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating and For Sale
13	<i>In Neutral Restaurant</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
14	<i>Keppel's Hotel</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (Vibe Hotel now built on the site)
15	<i>Lit &amp; Beyond</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
16	<i>Manical Mechanicals</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
17	<i>Marysville Alpaca Shop</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (relocated to Healesville)
18	<i>Marysville Bakery</i>	survived fire & operating (sold to new owners post-fire)
19	<i>Marysville Biscuits</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (relocated to Healesville)
20	<i>Marysville Christmas Shop</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (owner died in fires)
21	<i>Marysville Doctor's Surgery</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
22	<i>Marysville Hardware</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
23	<i>Marysville Homewares</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
24	<i>Marysville Lolly Shop</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating and For Sale
25	<i>Marysville Opportunity Shop</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating
26	<i>Marysville Patisserie</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & now closed
27	<i>Marysville Petrol Station</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating (as self-service fuel only)
28	<i>Marysville Ski Hire</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
29	<i>Marysville Ski Shop</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (owner died in fires)
30	<i>Marysville Take-away &amp; Pizza</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
31	<i>Marysville Post Office &amp; Gifts</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating and For Sale
32	<i>Marysville Real Estate</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (owners died in fires)
33	<i>Marysville Supermarket</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
34	<i>Marysville Visitor Centre</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
35	<i>Pat's Hairdressing</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & now closed
36	<i>Terracotta Room Restaurant</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (as of 3/17 now re-opening)

<b>Pre-fire Businesses Summary:</b>	<b>36</b>
Pre-fire businesses rebuilt and operating	13
Pre-fire businesses destroyed and not rebuilt	19
Pre-fire businesses rebuilt and not operating	2
Pre-fire survived fire and operating	1
Pre-fire survived fire and not operating	1
<b>Total Pre-fire Businesses</b>	<b>36</b>

Total pre-fire businesses rebuilt and now for sale = 4 (out of 15 operating pre-fire businesses)

<sup>280</sup> **NB:** *Italics* indicates the actual business name. Only businesses actually situated in Marysville are included.

<b>Marysville Pre-fire Ski Shops:</b>	<b>4</b>
Pre-fire Ski Shops rebuilt and <b>operating</b>	2
Pre-fire Ski Shops destroyed and <b>not rebuilt</b>	2

**New Post-fire Businesses:**

#	Business Name:	Status:
1	<i>A Matter of Taste Café</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
2	<i>Bendigo Bank</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
3	<i>By The Falls (café, gifts, old wares)</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
4	<i>Chell's Chicken Shop</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
5	<i>Eagles Nest Antiques</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
6	<i>Elevation 423 Café</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
7	<i>Lazy River Café</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
8	<i>L J Hooker Real Estate</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
9	<i>Made in Marysville, craft shop</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
10	<i>Marysville Pharmacy</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
11	<i>Professionals Marysville Real Estate</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
12	<i>Mrs Fusspot's Tea Shop</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
13	<i>Penny Lanes Craft &amp; Wares</i>	new business, <b>now closed</b>
14	<i>Chocolate in Marysville</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
15	<i>Terracotta Restaurant</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
16	<i>The Duck Inn</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>

<b>New Post-fire Businesses Summary:</b>	<b>16</b>
New post-fire businesses opened and <b>operating</b>	9
New post-fire businesses opened and <b>now closed</b>	7

<b>Marysville Pre- and Post-Fire Shops:</b>	
Marysville shop buildings – pre-fire	32
Marysville shops operating – pre-fire	32
Marysville empty shops – pre-fire	0
Marysville shop buildings – post-fire 2017	33
Marysville shops operating – post-fire 2017	19
Marysville shops empty – post fire 2017	14

Note that the pre-fire shop occupancy rate was 100%. As of August, 2017, the post-fire shop occupancy rate is 58%, leaving 42% of shops vacant.

**Pre-fire Accommodation:**<sup>281</sup>

#	Business Name:	Status:
1	<i>Allawah Country Cottages</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
2	<i>Amber View Cottages</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
3	<i>Anastasia's Cottage</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
4	<i>Ashlar Cottage</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
5	<i>Baree Cottages</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
6	<i>Blackwood Cottages</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
7	<i>Camellia Log Cabin</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
8	<i>Crossways Cabins</i>	<b>survived fire &amp; operating</b>
9	<i>Dalrymples</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & <b>operating</b>
10	<i>Delderfield</i>	<b>survived fire – with damage &amp; now closed</b>
11	<i>Eagle Mountain Retreat</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>

<sup>281</sup> I am indebted to Mrs Val Cockerell, a long-time Marysville resident who with her now deceased husband Max (who died soon after the fires) were involved in the tourism and accommodation industry and whose home survived the fires. Val was able to provide much information from her personal records regarding pre-fire Marysville accommodation.

12	<i>ESA Campground</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (now Camp Marysville)
13	<i>Falls Road Cottages</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
14	<i>Fernbrook Cottage</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating
15	<i>Fruit Salad Farm</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
16	<i>Green Gables</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
17	<i>Kerami House</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating (now Kerami Manor)
18	<i>Lomatia Lodge</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
19	<i>Lyell Guest Cottages</i>	destroyed, rebuilt & operating
20	<i>Magnolia House</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
21	<i>Marysville Caravan Park</i>	largely destroyed, now rebuilt & operating
22	<i>Marysville Keppel's Hotel</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt (Vibe Hotel now built on site)
23	<i>Mathildes</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
24	<i>Melina Cottage</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
25	<i>Mystic Mountains Cottages</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
26	<i>Nanda Binya Lodge</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
27	<i>Rendezvous Cottages</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
28	<i>Riverside Cottages</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
29	<i>Scenic Motel</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
30	<i>Somerled Mountain Retreat</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt
31	<i>Tower Motel</i>	survived fire & operating
32	<i>View All Cottage</i>	destroyed, not rebuilt

<b>Pre-fire Accommodation Summary:</b>	<b>32</b>
Pre-fire accommodation destroyed and not rebuilt	24
Pre-fire accommodation survived fire and operating	2
Pre-fire accommodation survived fire and now closed	1
Pre-fire accommodation rebuilt and operating	5
<b>Marysville Pre-fire Accommodation</b>	<b>32</b>

**New Post-fire Accommodation:**

#	Business Name:	Status:
1	<i>A Mountain House</i>	new business & operating
2	<i>Alpino Apartments</i>	new business & operating
3	<i>Aluka</i>	new business & operating
4	<i>Amazing Bush Accommodation</i>	new business & operating
5	<i>Amelinas</i>	new business & operating
6	<i>Annex Marysville Studio</i>	new business & operating
7	<i>Camp Marysville</i>	new business & operating
8	<i>Cranleigh</i>	new business & operating
9	<i>Balangara</i>	new business & operating
10	<i>Barton Mill</i>	new business & operating
11	<i>Bellara</i>	new business & operating
12	<i>Bella Vista</i>	new business & operating
13	<i>Goldberry Accommodation</i>	new business & operating
14	<i>Greenlands Guest House</i>	new business & operating
15	<i>Hartamas Home</i>	new business & operating
16	<i>Keppel Lodge</i>	new business & operating
17	<i>King Lyells Corner</i>	new business & operating
18	<i>Kings View</i>	new business & operating
19	<i>Lithgow Falls</i>	new business & operating
20	<i>Lyall – For (sic) Seasons</i>	new business & operating

21	<i>Marysleigh of Marysville</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
22	<i>Marysville Escape</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
23	<i>Marysville Garden Cottages</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
24	<i>Marysville Villas</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
25	<i>Moondani</i>	new business & <b>now closed</b>
26	<i>New Heights Cottage</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
27	<i>oneOeight</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
28	<i>Settlers View</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
29	<i>Stompin Wombats</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
30	<i>Sugarloaf</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
31	<i>Terracotta</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
32	<i>The Bungalow</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
33	<i>Valley View</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
34	<i>Vibe Hotel</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>
35	<i>Winter Rose Cottage</i>	new business & <b>operating</b>

<b>New Post-fire Accommodation Summary:</b>	<b>35</b>
Post-fire accommodation <b>now operating</b>	34
Post-fire accommodation opened and <b>now closed</b>	1

**NB:** Most of the pre-fire weekender accommodation has not been rebuilt.

**Pre-fire Guest Houses:**

#	Business Name:	Status:
1	<i>El Kanah</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & <b>operating</b>
2	<i>Kerami Gardens</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
3	<i>Kerami Guest House (now Manor)</i>	destroyed, now rebuilt & <b>operating</b>
4	<i>Kooringa/Mary Lyn Resort</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
5	<i>Marylands Country House</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
6	<i>Mountain Lodge</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b>
7	<i>The Cumberland Resort</i>	destroyed, <b>not rebuilt</b> (Vibe Hotel built on this site)

<b>Pre-fire Guest Houses Summary:</b>	<b>7</b>
Pre-fire Guest Houses rebuilt and <b>operating</b>	2
Pre-fire Guest Houses destroyed and <b>not rebuilt</b>	5

\* \* \* \* \*

## Community Development In Recovery From Disaster

Australian Emergency Manual Series (2003)

Part III

Volume 3 — Guidelines

Guide 13

The management and delivery of disaster recovery services is based upon the following principles, derived from those approved by the Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators in 1989.

Disaster recovery is most effective when:

- Management arrangements recognise that recovery from disaster is a complex, dynamic and **protracted** process,
- Agreed plans and management arrangements are **well understood by the community** and all disaster management agencies,
- Recovery agencies are properly integrated into disaster management arrangements,
- Community service and reconstruction agencies have input to key decision making,
- **Conducted with the active participation of the affected community,**
- Recovery managers are involved from initial briefings onwards,
- Recovery services are provided in a timely, fair, equitable and flexible manner,
- Supported by training programs and exercises.

The underlying basis of these Principles is a **community development approach**. Specifically, in the disaster recovery context this is defined as **the empowerment of individuals and communities to manage their own recovery**. Consequently, individuals and agencies involved in community development in recovery from disaster have a very clear role to **support and facilitate individual and community recovery**. In so doing positive community outcomes are promoted.

Given that a **community development approach is critical to effective community recovery** from a disaster these Guidelines aim to inform the full range of government departments, agencies and individuals likely to be involved in the disaster recovery process. However, it is also essential that individuals and agencies responsible for community development activities and initiatives be aware of the broader recovery system in which they operate, and integrate within it.

These Guidelines offer a range of practical information in a number of specific areas, including:

- **Desired outcomes for community development in the disaster context,**
- Indicators of need to identify when it may be appropriate to resource and promote community development activity,
- Funding and employment of community development officers,
- Management and support of community development officers, and
- A range of specific initiatives and activities which may be appropriate to community development work in a disaster context.

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If the above guidelines have been in place since 2003, it would seem curious that they were not effectively implemented with bushfire-affected communities after the 2009 Black Saturday fires. (NB: highlighting added.)

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