

The Journey – Harper, Year 4, NSW

Mum tugged my sleeve and I jumped into the car. We sped down the driveway, leaving our beautiful house behind. I glanced back, trying to grab one last look at it. All I saw was the oak sapling I had planted one year ago. It stretched out of the ground like it was someone's hand reaching out, waving one last goodbye.

This was undoubtedly the craziest thing that ever happened to me in my 6 long years of life. For war had broken out in Newcastle.

After sitting impatiently for 45 minutes in my car seat, we turned a corner only to see a huge queue of cars, trucks, and vans. The line seemed to stretch across the whole road, every little bit of it, up until the docks, but that wasn't a figure of my imagination, it was true.

After 1 hour of trying my best not to ask any questions that may make me sound distraught, I asked "Mum... where are we going?" I said it in a tone of voice that mum could just hear.

"We are going to Honeysuckle Marina sweetie." She paused for a moment, turning a corner on the road. "And we are here!"

I looked up at the windscreen and saw a car park full of vans, cars, and trucks. We found a spot right next to a big truck, got out and I was amazed at the sight in front of me. There were crowds and crowds of people lining up in queues in front of wharves. And in front of those wharves were the biggest boats I'd ever seen. I also noticed something else, in front of the boats were actual military soldiers.

When mum finally stepped out of the car, she kneeled down in front of me and said, "Sweetie, I know this is a bit scary, but it'll be ok." She said it in the same voice she read my bedtime stories in, soft and relaxing.

"Alright mum." I replied, and then we both took a deep breath, in perfect unison.

Soon it had been 15 minutes waiting in a queue; when I looked at mum, she had a stern expression on her face, and was wearing jeans and a white jumper. She had a large backpack, filled to the brim.....

'Hang on, where is my bag?' I thought.

"Mum I... I can't find my bag!" I panicked, but mum sped off. I watched her go and realised that I was left alone in the line.

After 5 minutes without mum, a big group of people came by, they were led by 2 soldiers, and there were about 30 people. Enough to knock a little girl over. I should know, I was that little girl!

Carelessly they pushed me over and walked away. I didn't like it when they left me there. I felt violated, but I managed to clamber up, and try to locate my line. I saw a lady's back, she was wearing the same jeans and white jumper as my mum.

I thought, 'it must be her!' I felt a huge relief that she was back safe.

Turns out life is horrible. It's like when you fight your way out of hell, only to find the devil waiting on the other side. Because as soon as I hopped on to the boat, the lady I 'thought' was mum, turned around, and..... it wasn't her.

I ran to the edge of the ship, looking out to the deep sea, wondering 'how will I ever find her?'

Suddenly I heard my name being called.

"CINDY!"

I looked up and saw my mum yelling my name from the opposite ship.

"MUM!" I screamed, tears came rolling down my face, "No." I sobbed.

Later, I was sitting at a table in the cafeteria of the boat, sad and scared. I didn't know what to do, or where to go. But then a boy slightly older than me and a man about my mum's age walked past. Too embarrassed for them to see me crying, I hid my face in my arms, wondering if they would notice me. But they did stop, and I did feel someone tapping me on the shoulder. Looking up the second time, for I was wiping my tears away, I was stunned.

Not only did I know them, they were my family!

My mother and father had divorced when I was very little, about 4. My brother, Nico, and I were very close, so when our parents split, we were devastated.

"Nico!" I gasped.

"Cindy!"

I immediately hopped up and hugged him.

"Nico who is this?" Dad asked, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Dad, it's me," I said, a little sad he didn't recognise me.

"Cindy?" he gasped.

“Yes dad it’s me!”

I pulled him in and we all shared a peaceful, loving moment. At last I was with my brother and father. Not my mother.

“Oh Cindy, we missed you so much,” he said, gesturing to Nico.

Later in the afternoon, Nico, dad and I were catching up in our cabin, when an announcement turned on.

“Please head to the cafeteria for dinner,” it said. “NOW!”

In seconds there were people lining up for food; me and my family joined the line too. The chef dumped some soggy mashed potatoes on my plate. ‘Yuck’.

I was just sitting down, when a soldier suddenly grabbed my wrist, and unbuckled my watch.

“All technology must be confiscated,” he said.

Nico stood up for me, “With all due respect sir, this watch is not a form of technology.”

The soldier grunted, dropping my arm. Then he turned to dad who asked, “Why is this happening sir?”

The soldier explained to us, “Tech experts can use these things,” he said, grabbing dad’s phone. “As tracking devices.”

“Oh,” we all said. This was getting too real.

For the next three days, we were stuck doing army drills the whole day. And finally after those three days, we arrived in New Zealand.

I’d never travelled overseas before, but when I stepped off the boat for the very first time, a thought hit me. ‘If we are trying to run away, will we find mum?’

I realised I hadn’t told Nico and dad about mum! I promised I would make time for it later, but for now, I was ready to see New Zealand! Sadly, all we did for the rest of the day was more drills, and when it was all over, I slept.

“Everybody up!” The soldier’s voice woke me.

I woke the others up, and then we all strode out of the hotel, only to find soldiers loading people into trucks.

“Hey you!” they yelled at us. “In the truck, single file.”

I noticed something about the soldiers’ voices, it wasn’t the sweet, kind voice your mum might have, or the funny humorous tone your grandpa always speaks in. No, it was a stern demanding vocal, and sometimes it made me scared.

Nico and I stepped into the truck, and I inhaled the aroma. It was a new smell....mothballs. Ignoring the scent I sat down.

When we were on the road I made myself tell my family the full story about mum’s disappearance.

“Um guys, I have something to tell you.” They both looked at me, so I cleared my throat and explained the whole thing, “And that’s how you found me.”

Dad’s eyes widened. “Clara.”

“MUM!” Nico shrieked.

“But it, it’ll be ok, won’t it dad?” I stammered.

He didn’t reply.

I heard the tyres squeak on squidgy mud, and it gave me a fright when the soldiers opened the slide doors.

“Quiet!” they shouted.

When we exited the truck, I saw a beautiful canopy of trees, and in the corner of my eye the glint of a shimmering lake.

Later when we had settled in, Nico and I set out to find the lake. We crossed trees, bridges and little rivers, eventually finding it. The lake was a beautiful place, snowy mountains stretched across the horizon, behind us a beautiful canopy of trees, instead of sand, stones, and the water was beyond description. We sat there for a while, discussing what this was, how much we missed each other, and what we would do next.

“Look at the sunset,” Nico pointed out.

“Yeah I suppose we should head back now,” I said.

“Last one there is a rotten egg!” shouted Nico, taking off.

“Oh you’re on!”

The next day we brought dad there, and once again watched the sunset. Even though we enjoyed it, the terrible memory of losing mum still lay in the back of my head.

After weeks of doing this, we started to slowly walk back.

“Cindy...” I heard my story time voice say. I spun around and saw..... Mum.

It was mum, my mum. And we were all reunited even at this terrible situation. We could work through it together. We were family.