

After my parents divorced, and their joint decision that my younger brother and I would be living with Dad, we soon realized we were going to need a Nanny. Dad had never so much as poured himself a bowl of cereal, let alone touched a vacuum cleaner. He immediately started interviewing young women and found that one was best. She seemed kind, smart with short brown hair and kind, gentle eyes. I liked her immediately. But she turned the job down, so we hired the second-best candidate. A smoking, ex-army, rough-as-guts woman with pale skin and a long blond mullet. Her name was Carryn. She was shockingly inappropriate, swore like a true Aussie and didn't give a fuck about rules. She wore baggy t-shirts and 80's jeans – even though it was the 90s. And it didn't take me long to absolutely love her. In Australia, we'd call Carryn a bogan. She drove a huge old beat-up Holden something, and would chain smoke out the window. At traffic lights, she'd say "how close d'ya think I can get to the car in front?" as she edged close enough to touch the car in front of us. It was thrilling.

She only knew how to cook three things. Potato cubes in mayonnaise. Roast carrots in honey. And roast pork or lamb chop also in honey. It was the best. After years of eating Mum's elaborate vegetarian concoctions, Carryn's food was simple and delicious. It tasted like what we were actually eating. I couldn't stop complimenting her on her cooking and she'd nod, knowingly - "Yep. It's the best way to cook carrots and chops. Just add honey, and burn it a bit."

Carryn came into our lives at a pivotal time. I was 13. At a new high-school, that was private - and terrifying - and I hated it. Dad had just met someone - Anne - and was fast falling in love, which meant he and Mum were defiantly not getting back together. And Mum had turned into someone I couldn't even recognize; A red-eyed-grief-monster, who to spend time with, felt like bathing my insides in fire. Everything was changing, and I had no control of it. My body. My emotions. My family. I'd lost all my old friends and hadn't made any close friends at high-school, so Carryn was the one I talked to. We spent hours with bricks wrapped in sandpaper, sanding the floor of the new cottage Dad had just bought — that was going to be our new home.

Carryn said us kids were going through a hard time, and even though I didn't believe it, when she said it, it had felt like love coming out of her mouth, and I lapped it up. I asked her questions about Dad and Anne, wanting reassurance (everything was going to be fine, right?) Dad's

awesome right? Isn't he a good man? An amazing man, right? How did I not see it? He's like a whole new person! Look at the red sports car he's driving! It has 12 V horsepower! And he's a doctor and flies planes and lets us eat ice-cream. Loads of it.

Every compliment anyone gave Dad would bolster my faith that my new life was going to be grand. And it sure did feel like it was, I was being given small freedoms. Freedoms of not having a parent always hovering at home.

Carryn once took us to her house briefly where she lived with her boyfriend, Damian. It was messy as hell. Stank of smoke and burnt pork chop, and fabric softer she liked to use. Pink Floyd was playing. It was the first time I'd ever heard Pink Floyd and I liked it - it sounded sad and dreamy. Like my moods. Carryn told us stories about "pigging" - where she would shoot wild boar from the back of a truck in the outback. Stories of being chased by one. She had a positive outlook on life and seemingly no direction. All I knew is that she was planning on marrying Damian.

It didn't take long... only maybe a few months before we were living in the Cottage. Dad asked Anne to move in, and he immediately let Carryn go. I was happy about Anne, but was sad about Carryn. She'd helped me through an intense transition, and I was going to miss her fun, bad-ass company. And her smell. Her cooking. And honestly, I couldn't believe that she seemed to like me - as a human in the world. Her approval was a salve to my plummeting self-esteem. I was upset when Dad and Anne didn't invite her to their wedding, not even a year later, and seemly wanted to phase her out of our lives. But part of me also understood. Carryn was from a different world. She didn't take shit from anyone, which probably grated on my dad. She was crass and classless, but good hearted and she cared. She was my bad-ass-mutha-fuckin-Mary-Poppins, and I will forever love and be grateful for her.