BEHIND THE CLOSED DOOR

Chris and I met in high school when we were just fifteen years old. We had made plans, even back then. We would both finish high school, work towards our careers, work jobs and save as much money as we could and when we were about twenty-five, we would travel then buy a house, settle down and start a family aged around thirty. It was the perfect dream, although it didn't turn out that way.

Here I was at twenty-four years of age with three children, Noah, four and the twin girls Jessica and Michelle, three years of age, no house and no career. We hadn't even travelled except for a few trips to Sydney or Brisbane for a couple of days each time. Chris continued his work to support us.

Then, out of the blue, Chris was offered a promotion with a substantial bonus. Of course, he took the promotion, which meant a higher wage and a more responsible position, with some travelling too. Chris was advised that any travelling less that one week, the family could be catered for too. Now was our chance to make up for the plans we didn't keep.

The following week, Chris had a conference in California for four days which meant we could all go. Chris and I decided I would use some of the bonus money to take Noah, Jessica and Michelle to Disneyland while he was at the conference that first day. The second day, Chris had time off, so we decided to explore California as a family. The third day Chris was at work again and the kids were tired from the busy last two days, so we just stayed at the hotel and had a lazy day. The next day would be busy too. We had to pack up, get to the airport and travel all the way back to Melbourne, Australia.

We stepped off the plane at 5:30am on a freezing cold winter morning. None of us were dressed for the occasion. We were all dressed in our summer clothes, shorts and t-shirts after leaving California on a beautiful warm summer's day. The taxi arrived promptly, and we were driven back to the house we had rented for the past six years. At least it would be warm.

The house was nothing much. Just your plain old three-bedroom house with a small garage, a shed and average sized back yard. It did us for now, while the children were still small. We would have to make other arrangements when they became a little older.

Fortunately, since Chris' promotion, we were able to save a lot more money. Even when we travelled overseas, the trips were all paid for, so we had free holidays as well as being able to save money. In a few months, we should have saved up enough money to apply for a loan to buy our house we had dreamed of since we were fifteen.

We saved and saved every penny we could. What we didn't really need, we didn't purchase. We still had our holidays which were fully paid for, so we spent very little anyway. Six months later we decided to go and look at some display homes. I didn't really want to live in the city anymore. It would be fun to live in a nice big house close to a lake but not too far away so Chris could still go to work, and we could all still travel.

One year after Chris' promotion, we finally had enough money to put a deposit on a house. We went to the bank to see how much we could borrow, and we were offered more than enough to buy a house. So, now it was time to go looking for our dream house. We visited lots of real estate agents before we were offered a house, just outside the city, close enough for Chris to travel to and from work, me to do the shopping and the kids to go to school.

The house had everything going for it. It was double storey home with a double kitchen/dining room, double lounge, master bedroom with ensuite, all three rooms with built in robes and ceiling fans, two split systems, one in the lounge and one in the kitchen. It had an attic and a cellar for extra storage. It had a very large garden area which would give the children plenty of room to play. A short five-minute walk takes you to a pier and a lake just as I had dreamed. I explored the house thoroughly at least twice over to take it all in. It was exactly what we dreamed of.

Now was the best time to move. Noah was just turning five and would be starting school in a couple of months. The twins were nearly four and would be ready for day care soon. We had a big job ahead of us. We had to pack everything up, which took the most amount of time, label everything to make sure of no loses or breakages and make sure we kept Noah and the twins favourite toys unpacked so there were no tears over them being lost or misplaced. Once we were satisfied that everything that needed to be packed, was, the removalist was called. Chris' company paid for the removalist. Soon were we in our new house. We had an even bigger job unpacking and making sure that everything would be

put in its rightful place. Chris did a few overseas trips alone while I spent my time taking care of the children and organising the new house.

One night when Chris was on one of his trips overseas and the children were asleep, I decided to explore the house again, in great depth. I walked into every room of that house including the attic and the cellar. Everything was so big. I walked back down the stairs from the attic and went to check on Noah and the twins. Right in between the two bedroom doors, was another door which I had not seen before. “I’m sure that wasn’t there before, I’ve explored every inch of this house thoroughly”, I murmured to myself. “Should I open it and look in there too”, I asked myself out loud. I decided I would check the children first. I went into Noah’s room. He was sleeping peacefully, holding on to his teddy bear. As I walked out of his room to check on the girls, I glanced towards the other door, which had just disappeared. “What’s going on here”, I asked myself so loudly that the children began to move around in their beds.

Before I could do anything about that door, I would have to wait until it reappears or until Chris came home so I could discuss it with him. I didn’t know

how I should feel. Should I be scared or was I just tired and seeing things? I stood there for some time waiting for the children to settle again and to see if this was or not my imagination. I went to lie down and try to sleep but I couldn't get the door out of my mind. How could it be there one minute and not the next? I eventually drifted off into dreamless sleep.

When I awoke, it was dead silent. I looked at the time. It was 9:45am. The children should be awake by now, but I heard no sound. What if they had found the door, opened it to see what was on the other side, gone in and the door had disappeared again? I hurried out of bed, threw my clothes on and ran out of the room frantically yelling, "Noah, Jessica, Michelle, where are you?" I checked the whole house, then I heard squeals of laughter coming from the back yard. There they were the three children playing out in the backyard. I sighed gently in relief and started back to the children's rooms to look if the door had reappeared.

As I became closer to where that extra door had been, and I couldn't believe my eyes. The door was wide open and there was a whirling bright white light coming from where it used to be. I inched closer and I felt the light trying to pull me in. I stepped back

away from the force and wished for the door to disappear again before the children were back inside and became curious. Chris would be home from his trip overseas tomorrow. I would wait and discuss it with him then. I called the children inside for lunch and miraculously the door had disappeared again. I sighed a little more heavily this time.

I thought long and hard about the door and what it meant. Why was it disappearing and reappearing again? Was it trying to tell me something? Was whatever was in there needing me for some reason? It distracted my hours so much that it was getting dark, and I almost forgot to cook the children's dinner. I didn't want to go near the door or where it used to be. It was beginning to scare me with whatever power it seemed to possess. I had to just ignore it while I put the children to bed. I tried to not look at the place where the door had been as I entered and left the children's rooms.

When Chris returned from work the next day, I couldn't wait to tell him about the door. Firstly, I took him to where I had seen the door and asked him if he remembered it. He told me I was imagining things and to put it out of my mind.

“It was definitely there”, I told him, then proceeded to tell him about the second time and what had happened. “Just wait and see”, I told him. “I’m very confident it will reappear again sometime. I just hope it happens while you’re here.” Chris would be home for the next few nights so I hoped I could show it to him before he was back on his overnight work.

Chris had two weeks before he had to travel again so that meant he would be home for nights during this time. For the first week there was nothing of the door and Chris was starting to think I was going mad. Then one day Chris had taken the children down to the lake and I was cleaning the house. I approached the children’s bedrooms to put their clothes away and the door was back.

“Why does this only happen when I’m alone”, I asked myself, trying to keep calm. I ran out the door screaming to Chris to come home. By the time he got back, the door was gone again. I begged it to come back and show itself to Chris, but this just made him think I was even more crazy.

Things went on as usual except for me being preoccupied with the door and when it would show itself again or if it would ever show itself to Chris. I couldn’t let Chris go on thinking that I’m some mad

woman hallucinating. Then the night before Chris had to go away again, I was still trying to convince Chris that the door exists, when we both heard a loud kind of scratching noise. Chris was sure it was mice or rats, but I wasn't as sure as that. We both got up from bed and cautiously started down the stairs. As soon as we got to the bottom of the stairs, we both realised that the noise was coming from upstairs. So, up we went again. We would check the children, then follow the noise to find it. When we got closer to the children's rooms, we both saw the bright light coming from a doorway that doesn't really exist.

"Now do you believe me", I asked Chris in a sarcastic way. "Don't go to close, it tried to suck me in." So, they both backed away from the door. With that, the light went away, and the door slammed shut. Within half a minute the door was gone again which left us staring at an empty wall.

Chris decided not to go on overseas trips for a while so he could be home with us at nights, just in case something weird happened, or we were all sucked up into the door. Up until now, we knew that the light only appeared when the door was open, and the light didn't like us backing away from it. Then Chris

had and idea. Since the light only appears and tries to suck them in when the door was open, maybe they should wait until the door appears and is closed, then they should open in themselves instead of the power opening it. So, they waited and waited and waited. It seemed like the door would never appear again. Maybe whatever was behind the door, could read our minds and could always know what we were thinking. The door was occupying most of the time. We took it in turns to sleep so they wouldn't miss the door if it happened to appear.

Chris would have to go back to his travelling executive job soon or we wouldn't be getting enough income to meet the repayments on the house even if it was a bit of a strange house. We were still both in a daze and obsessed by that door. Every time the children were out of the room, it was all we talked about. Two days before Chris had to go back overseas, I was up doing the night shift, when I heard a clanking noise. I walked towards where the sound was coming from. Of course, the door was back, and the noise was coming from behind it.

"Please, don't wake the children, please don't wake the children," I prayed to myself as I quickly ran to wake Chris before the door disappeared again. Chris

woke easily and we both went to the door. I sighed again with relief, the door was there, and it was closed. Now we would try Chris' idea and open the door ourselves. Not knowing what to expect, we opened the door with our eyes closed in case it was something that we didn't want to see. A small voice spoke and said,

"You don't need to be afraid of me, you can open your eyes, I won't hurt you. I just want someone to love me." We both opened our eyes simultaneously to see a beautiful blond little boy, not much older than about ten, sitting in the corner of a room that didn't exist, crying.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"The one that was left behind", he replied.

"Left behind from what?"

"I had a very intelligent Grandpa, who built a time machine. We travelled a lot in the machine, until one day I was playing at the lake and my family didn't know, so they left me behind."

"Where did they go?"

"I'm not sure, I guess to wherever was next to visit on the machine timer."

"Can't you just go there to meet up with them?"

“I’m afraid not, my Grandpa has the machine and might not be able to travel to the same place twice. This means I am stuck, popping in and out of your house indefinitely.”

“What’s your name?” I asked the little boy.

“I’m Taylor”, he replied.

“Hi Taylor, I’m very happy to meet you. My name is Ashleigh and this is Chris. We also have three children, Noah, Jessica and Michelle. They are a bit younger than you.”

I was about to step into the room when Taylor yelled, “Stop, don’t come in, you might get stuck in this room forever, like me.”

“How do you keep coming back then?”

“I’m not sure, but when my Grandpa was building the machine, it took him a few attempts, so there are still bits and pieces from the old reject machines. One of them has three buttons but only one is labelled. It clearly says ‘RETURN’. Each time I press it, it brings me back here. I go again by pressing the next button. I’ve only ever pressed those two. I’m scared to press the third one.”

“Why don’t we push it together”, I suggested.

“No, you can’t come in”, said Taylor in a terrified voice.

“What are you scared of?”

“I don’t know, I just don’t want anybody to see what I’ve seen.”

Neither Chris nor I could stand the waiting any longer, so we stepped slowly into the room. The moment we stepped inside, a bright light started swishing around and carrying us with it. The only difference between this light and the other was that this light was red.

“Hang on to something”, said Taylor as things started to be sucked through the walls like there was a magnet on the other side. We hung on the best we could until everything had been sucked away including the house. The only thing left was the part of the machine that Taylor was tightly clutching. We were in a void and the only way to get out was to press the ‘RETURN’ button.

“Is this where you always go when the door disappears?”

“Yes”, he said, with no tone in his voice.

“How long have you been doing this?”

“About a year now. What year is it?”

“It’s 2008. Why? Where are you from?”

“I was born in 1901, and when I was five years old my Grandpa perfected his time machine. We travelled through time and to other dimensions. It was so much fun, until that day I thought the lake would be more fun.”

“Let’s get back home”, I suggested.

So, Taylor pressed the ‘RETURN’ button and there we were, back in the room that doesn’t exist, and everything was exactly how it had been before we left. Chris and I stepped out of the room, and I held out my hand to Taylor and gently said, “Come with us. We will take care of you.”

Taylor wasn’t sure what to do, but after some procrastination he decided it would be better than repeatedly hanging in a void. He took my hand and I lead him through the door. Almost immediately the door made a creaking noise then slammed shut and disappeared. Taylor still had the piece of the old machine. There was no way he was letting go of that. He still believed that if he pressed the ‘RETURN’ button the door would reappear. He hoped so anyway.

I made something for Taylor to eat then the other children came in and said they were hungry too. I

introduced them all then fed them. After they ate, the children all went out into the back yard to play. I discussed with Chris about Taylor staying. Chris said he should stay the night, play with other children the next day while waiting until he came home from work to decide what to do next. We made up a bed on the floor of Noah's room for Taylor to sleep. The children all went to bed while Chris and I discussed further about what to do with Taylor.

The next morning arrived without any disruptions. Chris got up early to prepare for work. The children were still asleep. It was no surprise since it was only 6:30am. After Chis left, I went back to bed in the silence. I fell asleep and woke up again at 8:30am. The children were awake. I could hear them chattering away, asking Taylor as many questions as they could, as quickly as they could. Taylor didn't say much. I got up to make breakfast for them and to ask Taylor how he slept and what he would like to do today. When breakfast was over, the children went outside to play. I don't think Taylor knew how to play, judging by the way he stood back and watched the others having fun.

The day continued to pass until it was almost time for Chris to come home. I prepared dinner and

dished it up just as Chris was walking through the door. We all sat down to eat. Something was wrong, Taylor wasn't eating.

"What's wrong", I asked him.

"Being here with you just reminds me of how much I miss my family." He answered.

"Well, after dinner we can sit and talk about the possibility of pressing that third button. It must be better than spending half your life in a void."

When dinner was over, I bathed the children and put the younger ones to bed. Now it was time to sort out this door business. We all three sat down and talked about the part of the old machine that Taylor was still holding very tightly in his hand. After some time of Taylor trying to avoid the situation, Chris spoke up.

"We can't sit here all night not doing anything. Let's go to where the door had appeared and it's time to press the third button."

We all climbed the stairs cautiously and headed to where the door had been.

"Are you ready", asked Chris.

"Yes", answered Taylor. "Here goes."

With that, all three put their finger on the button and pressed it. It smudged the dirt. It clearly said ‘HELP’. As soon as our fingers were off the button, the door reappeared. The white light was behind the door and a voice was there too calling, “Taylor, Taylor.”

“It’s my Grandpa”, cried Taylor. “Grandpa”, he yelled as the light disappeared and we could now see the old man.

Taylor told him all that had happened and that we took care of him and encouraged him to press the third button.

“I could have found you a lot easier if I had the courage to press that button”, said Taylor.

“Well, you have now and we’re back together again.”

They all waved goodbye to each other, Grandpa pressed another button on the new machine and the door disappeared forever.