



# BEFORE I WAS BORN

It was 1983. My mother, Kerri, went to the doctor because there were to be no more kids; my parents had decided that three crazy daughters were enough. The plan was to have her tubes tied. When she got in there, the doctor said, 'Either congratulations or commiserations.'

Mum thought maybe there was a problem with her health, but when he said he could probably help her out in six months, she knew she was pregnant. Mum was terrified by the prospect of another child, but Dad always wanted a boy.

In fact, he had already named the first, second, and third child Michael, but as he apparently used to say, he missed having a boy each time by half an inch.



**My mum and I at 6 months old, naive to what was growing inside.**

My family lived in the beautiful country town of Crossmaglen, which is 15 minutes south-west of Coffs Harbour on the east coast of Australia. We lived on a 5-acre property with fruit trees, chickens, dogs, a massive vegetable garden and a few sheep. It was a very tight-knit community where everyone knew everyone. People were accustomed to helping each other.

Neighbours routinely swapped food and other goods. My mum called it God's Country. We had properties all around us, most of which were banana plantations. We had a family living behind us who grew 10 acres of bananas. My mum told me that due to a lack of rain at the time, our neighbours sprayed their bananas to get them ready to be sold. Mum discovered much later that before our neighbour made the aerial spray, he had asked his wife to leave the house because it was suspected that she was pregnant.

At this stage, Mum was seven months pregnant. The very next day after the bananas were sprayed, she went into an early labour. Fortunately, the medical staff were able to stop the premature labour, and Mum went on to have a full-term pregnancy. To this day, we believe that it was the spray that caused her to go into labour, and we also suspect that it was the cause of many other health challenges.

On 2 May 1984, Mum had a painless delivery. She said that she was certainly aware that she was in labour with the girls, but she had no idea that she was in labour with me.

During the delivery, a physician by the name of Dr Scott was our gynaecologist. He waited for Mum to experience

signs of labour pain, which never arrived, although she was trying to push.

She started to push, and my head was partly out when the doctor noticed that the umbilical cord was wrapped around my throat. He asked Mum to stop pushing, and any woman who has ever given birth will understand that's almost impossible to do at that stage in labour. What Dr Scott and Dad experienced was something they both described as a miracle.

The doctor pushed my head back in and somehow I twisted around, the cord came loose, and out I came. As Dr Scott held me up in the air, he said: 'This child is here for a reason.'

My family and extended family were so delighted to add another member to the Crossland household. Dad finally had his son and Mum finally did what needed to be done to ensure there were no more surprises — four children were more than enough.

Life on the farm was ideal — so green, so fresh and so quiet.

We had a beautiful little freshwater creek that gently flowed through the back part of the property, and we would always swim there and play as a family.

These good times on the farm with my family were more complicated than I remember, though, because of the dark cloud of fear, heartache and pain that would consume us all for many long years. As we grow older, we tend to forget about the wonderful moments we shared together as a family, and instead reflect only on the challenging times. As adults, I think many of us forget to have a good time and to simply enjoy life.

Instead, we get stuck in a rut of trying to be mature and grown-up, until the rare times that we take a moment to look back. It is then that we realise that we are now much older. We have missed much of the excitement of what life is all about.

The good times on the farm with my family were about to come to an end, as a dark cloud of fear, heartache and pain was about to take over and consume us all for many long years.