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Corrections

Prudence Black

University of Sydney

Corresponding author: Prudence Black: prudenceblack@gmail.com

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Mopping up the Domestic

‘Where did that water on the kitchen floor come from?’

In our household, we used to spend a lot of time trying hard to get things right. Corrections: towards perfection in all things. At table, conversation was only at the level of ‘mildly interesting’, while the angle of Sebastian’s knife and fork left a *lot* of room for improvement.

Adjustments to behaviour: it’s an economy of pleasure and pain, reward and punishment. ‘If the Queen were here, you wouldn’t eat like that.’

‘Well, yes we would,’ they say.

The kids aside, Stephen was always working on little corrections to his psychic state; there was (and still is) a delicate balance to be achieved with the ingestion of chemical adjusters. Red wine in too great a quantity increases serotonin uptake but this can be corrected with judicious doses of Cipramil.

Water Weathering Uluru

A quick leap from domestic life to a trip to the West MacDonnell Ranges in 2011. There is water pouring down the rock. This is what happens when water is allowed to get out of hand.

Apparently, I behaved badly on the trip. Perhaps in retrospect I like camping in principal rather than in practice. It started when we got up at about 5am to head to the airport. Halfway to Melbourne Stephen pipes up, ‘I suppose we could have flown directly from Sydney to Alice...’

‘Mmmm,’ as I introduce a timely mood correction.

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Kangaroo Dish

Qantas misplaced our luggage so there we were -looking like dorks- each wearing grey pyjamas with a big leaping kangaroo across the front. To kill time we shopped, Stephen with the perfect dish in mind—kangaroo tail cooked in the sandy creek bed. And we saw them: great furry hulks of things hanging out of the freezers at the IGA in Alice. Hugo had come to the checkout with a load of junk food – chips, biscuits. ‘We’re not eating that rubbish,’ I say and then feel a bit mean, as he *did* offer to get snacks. Joe, on the other hand, came to the trolley with kangaroo fillets, beetroot, new potatoes, mustards, broccolini—a recipe for dinner. A meal that, in the end, turns out perfectly.

Standley Chasm

Can we just leave things up to time to get things right? In the case of Standley Chasm, several million years. I think Indigenous people teach by setting good examples, just getting on with it and then the next thing, the kids are imitating their elders. They don’t *intervene*, they set up the desire to follow.

Palm Valley

In the absence of an Indigenous ranger, Stephen embarrassed the kids by doing an imitation. ‘All this country is called ‘Mpulungkinya ... Mpulungkinya...’ I’ll give you all the pre-colonial place-names on our trip, in order: Rungutjirpa, Udepata, Mpulungkinya, Watarrka, Kata Tjuta, Uluru, Tatyeye Kepmwere.

Hermannsburg

We had pulled into Hermannsburg, too late in the day to see the mission so instead went straight out to Palm Valley. Two days later we returned, to go to the general store. The sign inside the shop said, ‘No school, no food, no excuses e.g. visiting relatives, sickness.’ Gosh, they’re tough out there. A few weeks later the school council and community leaders decide on strict new rules for school attendance ...not only can parents be fined, but those who do not take their parenting seriously will have their names publically posted and may be barred from the store.

We were excited to see a mob of wild horses run through the town, local dogs snapping at their legs.

Walking

We went for a walk each day. On one of the walks Stephen seemed to be going too slow. We waited.

‘What’s up?’

‘I was out of breath?’

‘How can you be out of breath?’

I get worried. Shit, he’s going to have a heart attack. This is not quite right.

So, he went to a cardiologist when we got home. The old cardiovascular system is as right as rain. ‘Performing better than your peers,’ said Dr Groenstein. ‘Just keep an eye on that salt intake.’ A minor correction.

Mouse

The taxi driver who drove us across town to pick up the 4WD warned us about the mouse plague, ‘It’s next year you’ll have to worry. That’s when the snakes will be in their thousands after feeding on the mice.’ I wasn’t worried, I knew about mouse plagues. I had grown up living alongside the grain silos in the Eyre Peninsula, South Australia.

Henbury Meteorite Reserve

145 km south of Alice. This is where the invasion really started to happen. The mice were already there when we arrived and then in a cloud of dust at sunset the French arrived, ‘Where is the Southern Cross?’ they asked.

It’s oh! so funny

The children think their parents are a joke and beyond correcting or even perfection. We returned to Alice, maybe a bit relieved and walked across the Todd River in search of the Olive Pink Botanical Garden. In retrospect a funny thing to do as we had just come from the bush. What did we want to find there? Hugo draws, Stephen and I fall asleep on a bench, Sebastian hangs, and Joe has shot through with his delightfully talkative mate who has arrived in Alice that afternoon. They are getting ready for the Wide Open Spaces festival—Joe can find a party anywhere.

Later we see Tony Abbot looking almost perfect in a crisp blue shirt, totally buffed. He’s there to unilaterally announce Round Two of the Intervention. The next day we’re at the local café reading the Northern Territory News: ‘Croc taken by UFO’. And there is Abbott displaying rubbish from the Todd for the cameras, no doubt visual evidence for further intervention.

Sunset

Sunset at the rock. I took a photo to send to Mick Taussig of the sunset, the boys and Stephen. Everyone else had been patient standing in front of their cars but our boys clambered with their deck chairs on to the roof of the Landcruiser. Strategic placement. There they could wonder about the idea of perfection and how to achieve it.