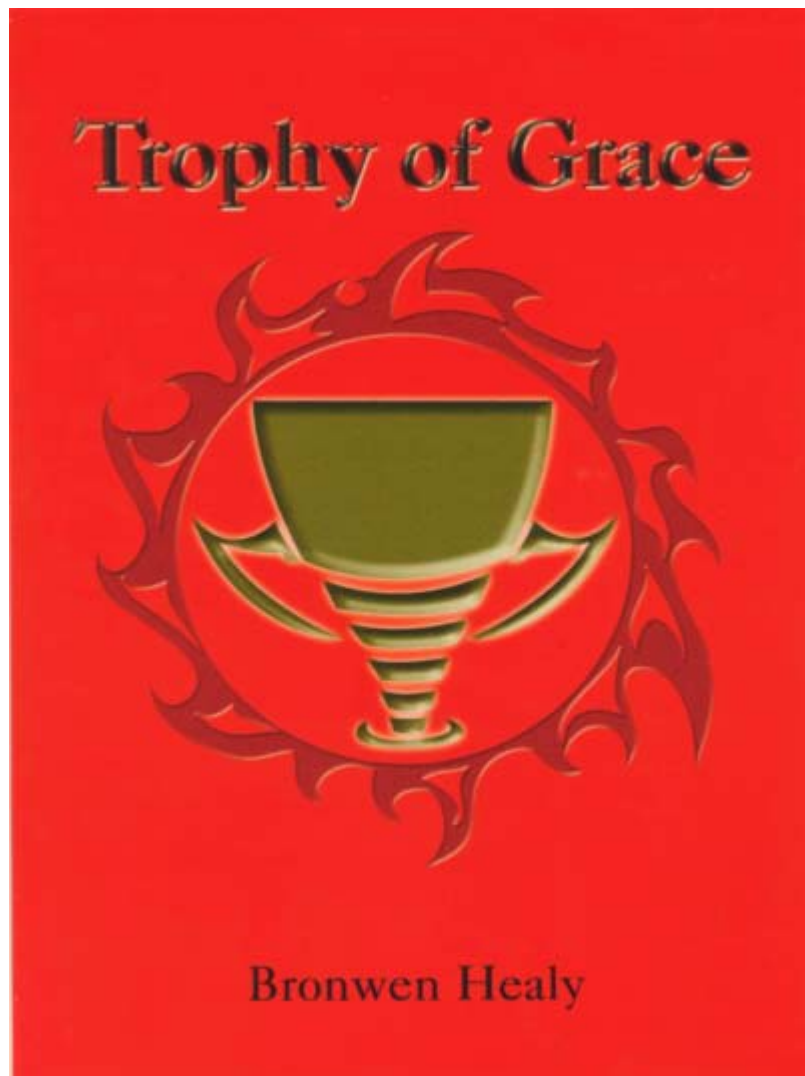


Excerpt of Chapter 3 from

Trophy of Grace

by Bronwen Healey



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<http://www.trophyofgrace.com>

Chapter Three: Against My Grain

During these times at Keight's place one of the guys that went there as well happened to sell pot by the ounce and he offered for Will to take some now and pay for it when he had sold it off in smaller amounts. Will took him up on the offer and when we were back at his place that afternoon I asked him if he minded giving me some to smoke. It was the first time that I had ever smoked pot and Will was the only person that I trusted to be with when the effect kicked in. Some people seemed to get really talkative, others really contemplative and others creative; I guess it was different for everybody. I happened to be one who got really contemplative and it seemed as though when I was stoned I was happy to talk about anything that came to mind for me, absolutely anything; God, the universe and everything about it. It must have seemed really funny for Will who had been smoking it since he was in Grade 8, and I actually didn't mind the effects as much as I thought I would. From then on I would only ever smoke it on the weekends and only once all of my homework and assignments were complete. How strange it must have seemed to people who lit up joints often on the way to the train station on the way home from school that by choice I would wait until all the things that were more important to me were complete.

So I had officially gone against my own grain and decided that I would enter into a new, and what seemed to be exciting, realm of life experience - drugs. It didn't actually seem like that big of a deal once I had started smoking pot. I had it so built up in my mind that it would change my life forever, and, of course, it did.

Towards the end of the year we all started to think about the fact that our school formal was coming up. I had decided that I wasn't going to go because one of my favourite bands, Public Enemy, was playing at Festival Hall that night. James was going to come with me and it was only after spending time with Sara one day when she said to me that she was going to ask James to the formal that I realised it was going to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Never again would I be in the position to go to my grade 12 formal and, so, at the last minute I changed my mind and decided to go. Of course, my partner was to be Will. I went shopping for a dress the week of the formal, though funnily enough there seemed to be something more important than that on the horizon for

everybody else - what drugs to organise. I wasn't going to take anything, due to the fact that I had really only just started smoking pot not long before. I soon realised just how big a night it was going to be and thought I would do drugs after all.

One of the most precious memories that I have about my dad and I was the night of my formal. I had spent very little time getting ready, but I felt like a princess, nonetheless. One of the things that I really wanted to do was to go and visit my dad at work so that he could see that his little girl could be such a beautiful woman. That night I felt like the most beautiful woman in the world; the minute that my dad laid his eyes, he melted. I am still sure that tears welled up in his eyes, as his vision of me became clearer. His little girl was just around the corner from being a woman. I could see his adoration for me and when he hugged me I thought that he was never going to let me go. I think he knew that my life was taking a major change, and he didn't believe that it was for the better. Nonetheless, that night he loved and adored me and told me how beautiful I was and just how proud of me he was. That part of my night I will always cherish and hold close to my heart. That night I knew deep down that my dad was always going to love me; I had no idea of how far I would push that precious love away though, only time could tell that tale.

One of our friends was organising acid trips but all that I understood about was that they were quite potent and hallucinogenic. I made a decision to wait until half way through the formal before I would take one. When the time was 'right' Sara and I went into the bathrooms and took half of one each. The small piece of cardboard that we chewed on and then swallowed was bright purple with a small yellow symbol on it; I honestly had no idea what it was or exactly what effect it was going to have on me. Within an hour I started to feel a bit strange and people started to seem different to me. Simon was chosen to do a speech on the night because he was someone who had attended the school from the first day of Grade 8. He was all dressed up with make up and everything - Gothic he told me. He got up to do his speech just as my acid trip started to really kick in, so I giggled my way through most of what he said. Five minutes after he finished I couldn't even remember what he had spoken about and that actually scared me a bit.

After Simon had finished his speech, and the other people that were speaking had spoken, dessert was served. I remember talking to Mr Kenny for almost five minutes about how beautiful the

strawberries and cream looked. He must have thought that I was definitely on something, though he actually never spoke of the night with me once it was over. Once we had eaten what we could of dessert (I couldn't eat much as it felt horrible in my stomach) we made our way out onto the mall.

One of the guys in our group was in a band and they practised in the old Target building in the middle of the Valley Mall. He had somehow talked his way into hiring out an entire floor of the building for our post-formal party. It was to be a night that we would never forget and as time passed I realised I couldn't actually remember what was happening to me; I was quite freaked out by the whole 'tripping out' experience. I remember going to the roof of the building at one stage of the night and having, what I thought was, a full-blown conversation with a pigeon. Will and James came up and saved me from myself and talked me through most of the rest of the night. The music seemed so loud, as though my head was going to burst, and everybody seemed so animated. At one stage I remember thinking I wished it would all just hurry up and be over. I no idea at that stage what was going to become of my life, but I knew that I didn't want to 'waste' too much time in any state like that!

The remainder of the school year went so quickly, with so much assessment and studying for end of year exams, that it almost passed by unnoticed to me. I just wanted so much to achieve the best that I could and I was more than willing to put in the hard work to do so. While I was busy studying most of the other people in the group, including Will, were busy organising a week away. Not to be anything like the 'Schoolies' week that is celebrated by the majority of people finishing grade 12, this was to be something different, and special. The time finally arrived that we were all to take off to one of the guy's parent's beach house on the Northern NSW coastline. We all organised borrowing cars and whatever we might need to get there, while the guy whose place it was organised all of the drugs. I will never forget when I first walked into the house, looking down onto the table and seeing white powder, tablets, acid trips and marijuana and thinking to myself, "What am I doing here?" So much of that week is a blur to me; I do know that while I was there I shared so much with Will, including my first experience on speed (amphetamines), ecstasy and both of these together. I remember sitting on the beach for hours on end just staring; at the sky, at the water, into people's eyes, thinking about the wonder of creation. It was a pity that it took being 'high' on drugs to feel like I could enter into this realm of wonderment and peace.

When we returned to Brisbane and normality I applied for a job at the Metro cinema in Edward Street in the City. I had been working at Hoyts 8 now for over two years and, thankfully, had happened to apply for the new job the same day that somebody else had quit and was given an interview and then the job. I loved my job at the Metro, it was an arty type of cinema that showed mostly foreign films and classics on Sundays. I met some really interesting people and made some special friends with the other staff members.

That school holiday passed by without much really happening. Will and I were still very happily together and working on helping one another become everything we dreamed we could be. Sara, Simon and Bill had moved into a house on Coronation Drive in the suburb of Auchenflower and I spent a lot of my spare time there. They had a couple of really big parties during those holidays, much like our time at schoolies - drug infested zones of nothingness. We all thought that we were pretty special and grown up, making decisions that would change our lives forever.

Then one day our results arrived for the end of Grade 12. When the envelope arrived I sat down on the end of my bed and just stared at it. Will was sitting there with me, holding my hand, encouraging me that I would be fine and that I had worked hard to achieve results and so I may as well open it up and see what they were. I waited until my mum and dad were both home from work as well before I opened the envelope. Then when I did open it I didn't want to look at it. After about five minutes my dad talked me into looking. I had gotten an O.P score of 8. Which was totally amazing to me as I had thought that I would get around 11 or 12. I was so excited I started to cry; I must've been overwhelmed because I have never cried very easily.

The next important thing to wait for during those holidays was the newspaper announcing the university offers. I had applied to do Film at the Queensland College of Art or the Bachelor of Arts at Griffith University majoring in Film and Media. Mum drove me to the Courier Mail newspaper printing factory just after midnight on the day that the offers were to be released and joined all the other school leavers in a hurry to find out where their futures lay. I opened up the newspaper quickly and sighed with relief I had been accepted into the Bachelor of Arts course at the Nathan

Campus of Griffith University, to start at the beginning of March. The year was 1993; a year of major changes for me.

University started without too much upheaval in my life, besides that of the 8:30 a.m. viewing of a film every Wednesday morning. This meant I had to get up around 6:30 a.m. - time that I had hoped would pass with the completion of Grade 12. I made a few new friends on the very first day. We all caught the same bus to uni and had all the same classes and tutorials. They were all really interesting people. They too all had big dreams of making movies that would be shown on the big screen, and we weren't going to be told differently by anybody. I was doing subjects that included film studies, social studies and psychology, which proved to be a very interesting mixture. It was a mixture that I was hoping would help me with the type of films that I wanted to focus on making, social-realism. Getting into the nitty-gritty of the way that people function seemed very interesting to me at the time. I had no idea how close I would get to such realism in my own life.

The group of people that I had become friends with were all into studying and doing well, which was really encouraging for me. They also enjoyed going out on the weekends and taking drugs, especially speed. We all had a few long weekends that lasted all the way from Friday afternoon until very early Monday morning. A bad habit to get into and an even harder habit to get out of. We would also go into the pub at the bottom of the Myer Centre on a Friday afternoon and drink lots of cheap alcohol. Will would often come in and join us there. I was so in love with him. He was so encouraging for me when I first started out at university. He was like a tower of strength for me at the time. I would sometimes also see James, Ian and Sara on the weekends, and soon enough Sara moved into a house with one of my new uni friends, a girl named Kristy. They were living at Petrie Terrace and I was soon spending a lot of my spare time there. We all knew how to have a good time. Drugs such as speed, ecstasy and pot were soon a normal part of my 'wind-down' time (even though in actuality they wound me up). I found that when I wasn't working at the Metro or at uni I was doing something to 'wind-down'. I was still quite happy to be living at home at the time and of course my parents had no idea what I was doing in my spare time. I spent most of my time with Will, somewhere or other. My parents loved and trusted Will to be with me and to look out for me: and he always did.

I did move out of home in the school holidays of September in that first year of uni. I moved in with some friends from Indooroopilly that also happened to be at university with me. Christine and Rod, my ex-boyfriend, were the people that I chose to live with for my first experience out of home. My parents were upset but supportive, as they were about most of my life-changing decisions, an attribute that I have always loved about them. When we found the place I thought that it was perfect. It was a falling down three-bedroom house on the main road at Highgate Hill. Between the three of us we paid \$180 per week, for what we all believed was our dream house. When I moved my mum went through all of her stuff for the house and gave me anything 'spare' that she had. So I moved into the house with absolutely everything that we would ever need.

Because we were all students of some kind we all spent a lot of our time in our rooms studying. It was great for me that Christine happened to be doing the same course, so we often spent late nights comparing notes. Will lived just a ten-minute walk from the house and he spent a huge amount of his time there. He and I would often just sit in my room and listen to music or talk about the future and what we wanted to make of our lives. I was determined to be a scriptwriter/director and he was keen on being a musician with an interest in film also. I used to love those times just lying on my bed talking our dreams out loud.

One of the things that Rod had brought into the house was a Nintendo 64 and I soon became an expert at Sonic the Hedgehog. Many a late night that should've been spent studying was spent playing that game until I 'beat' different levels. It is amazing what we can achieve when we really set our minds to it. It is also amazing to think just how much time I would have wasted playing that silly game. I would sometimes get home from work at around 10p.m and play until midnight then study until 2 or 3 am, only to get up at 7a.m for uni. What a crazy life that uni students lead. Then on the weekends when I wasn't working I would go out, take drugs and not sleep, and still be able to function on a Monday morning. I cringe at the thought of what I put my body and mind through at the time, let alone my soul.

The Christmas holidays of that year were very different for me. I was working almost 40 hours most weeks and when I wasn't working I was taking drugs, going out to parties or just hanging out with friends. I still saw Sara and James quite a lot. We had all changed quite significantly to when we

had been at school, but I think that I was making really deep changes. I was seeing even less and less of Will and I didn't really know why I was choosing to do that. It was partly my work schedule choosing for me, but when it came down to it I was more inclined to not want to see him much. It was strange for me because I was so used to wanting to be with him in every spare waking moment. One of the other reasons for my disinterest was because he had caught up with his old friends from State High and was spending a lot of time with them. They seemed to be really nice people and I guess I wanted for Will to work out his friendships with them before I came into the picture too much. At the time I knew my life was taking some turns - I just didn't know exactly how much they would affect the rest of my life.

The second year of university started without too much stress or trauma. I met some new people and caught up with the people from the previous year. I started to feel a little bit bored with university life around the first break of the year, the Easter holidays. It was around this time that I broke up with Will. I was a real coward about it. I called him up on the phone and told him, after talking to him for almost an hour, that I didn't think things were working out for us and it was time for me to take some time out, time for me. It came out of nowhere; there was no obvious distress in our relationship. For some reason I just felt as though it was time to move on. Will was very upset about my decision and so was I, but I knew that it was the right thing to do at the time (for me, anyhow).

The other change that took place during those holidays was that the lease on the house that I was living in ran out. By this time Rod and Christine had started seeing each other and were quite happily in love. I decided that with everything that was going on in my life at the time to find a place just for me. Of all the people to help me, trusty Will was the person who stepped up and offered his assistance. He was so good and loyal to me, way beyond the call of friendship. We found a small but cute two-bedroom flat down near the river at Hill End. It was \$110 per week, which was a lot for just me. But I was working and could afford it at the time. Anyhow, I thought that I needed the space for myself. Little did I know what would happen, being the giving person that I was and having a 'spare' bedroom.

I was basically working and studying and going out on weekends. During this time I was still actually spending quite a lot of my spare time with Will, and I happened to meet a lot of his friends. People that he had known for years suddenly became friends, or acquaintances, of mine. Life was a little strange and definitely getting stranger. I suddenly had a new circle of friends that all happened to be my ex-boyfriend's old friends. It must have all been very weird for Will at the time. Some of the people that I met at the time would become real friends and others were just passing through life and happened to venture into mine.

The place where I lived was around the corner from a squat that a lot of these people were living in. I would spend some of my time there and take them food and cigarettes when I could afford it. They would also come around to my place any other time that they needed a feed, a cigarette or some pot. I would give to them all continuously and was quite happy to do that. At the time I started to like one of the guys there, his name was James. He was six foot four, blond mohawks on each side of his head, tattoos on his arms and chest; and I thought that he was just beautiful. James was totally unlike anybody that I had ever known before and something about me must have intrigued him as well because we seemed to spend a lot of our time together. Within a couple of weeks we were sleeping together regularly and he was spending most of his time at my place. Some of his friends would often be there when I got home from work or uni and they would eat nearly all of my food and then want to sleep in the spare room. I knew that this wasn't any sort of healthy relationship that we were in, but for some reason I didn't stop.

It took me another couple of weeks before I just came home one day and exploded and told him and his mate to get out, I needed my space back. That was the end of my short lived relationship with James. I got my space for a short while until the next person in need of a bed came to me - I had no boundaries. I soon realised that the spare bedroom was more of a hindrance than a blessing and started to look for somewhere else to live, as my lease was almost up anyway. Unfortunately, it was the first of many broken leases. I spread the word around the people that I had met through Will, as I really wanted to stay in the area.

At the time Will was living in a beautiful large house on the top of Dornoch Terrace at Highgate Hill, 'Rodmaun'. This was, and probably always will be, one of the most special places that I would ever

live in. It was huge, two-levels with separate households on each level, a magnificent backyard and incredible people; a dream home for me at the time. No description that I could give would ever possibly do that house justice. All I needed was for one of the rooms, preferably downstairs, to become available, and it did. It all came about when one of the guys that lived in the downstairs section of the house invited me around to smoke some pot one afternoon. We both got really stoned and listened to some old Nina Simone albums and realised how well we got along. He then just asked me if I wanted to move in and I said yes straight away; I had already thought about it so much. So I gave two weeks notice at the flat and started to think about moving into my new home. I hadn't even asked which of the rooms I had. As it was, it was one of the smaller but really long rooms, it had sky blue painted walls and black floorboards. All this for only \$60 per week - I thought that it was a dream come true.

All of this was taking place amidst me going to work and studying. The cinema that I was still working at had moved to George Street in the city and was now known as the Dendy Cinema. One of the special guys that I worked with there, Stephen, worked at the street newspaper called Time Off and was starting up a fashion page and asked me to be the very first model. No doubt I was flattered. At the time I had just shaved my head for the first time and wasn't really what I considered to be conventional model material, but for the experience of it all I said yes.

I had an absolute blast doing the photo shoot. I remember the day so clearly. Stephen picked me up early and we went to his friend's place for breakfast who was the creative director. A very special lady named Anna was the photographer and she was there as well. We all drank lots of coffee and ate pastries and I just sat there listening to them all discussing what they wanted to do for the shoot. They wanted to focus on my head; they all commented on how beautiful the shape of it was and how great it looked shaved. So off we went. Many of the photos from the shoot had me with things on my head. One of them was of me sitting on a malibu-style skateboard in the middle of the road with no shoes on, a hat on the ground and a half-eaten apple on my head. This strange photo happened to also be the one they chose as the most effective. I was very excited to get my first copy of the paper with my photo in it. Another new and vivid experience under my belt, and life felt so exciting for me at the time.

