

Webs of our Connectedness

It's Monday morning, and two-year-old Sophie is sick. Truth be told, she's well enough in spirit and body, except that she's had conjunctivitis on the weekend. And so she can't go to day care. And Mum is away.

Monday morning, and the golden light floods the house, washing indiscriminately over surfaces that need dusting and piles of folded clothes that still need putting away. The brand new leaves on the hill of pinot outside my window sparkle with their aliveness. They're growing before our eyes, almost faster than we can catch them.

Monday morning and the frost gleams hard on the ground and the to-do list in my new black diary, waits balefully for my attention. The dog is under my feet, the cats are sneaking inside to hide, and the news drones on over my flurry of packing lunches, nappies, spare clothes – how many sets will she need today? ***Like mothers everywhere, I'm juggling things and things and things. Things to do. Things to remember. Things that stop me from thinking.***

And why am I packing her lunch anyway? Who am I fooling when I tell myself that the eye looks OK now? She can't go to day care with conjunctivitis. Despite the fact that it's almost certainly at day care that she picked it up...

She can't go to day care, and Mum is away, and the precarious structure that is my life tumbles in one single stroke.

Sophie, we need to put the drops in your eyes, I tell her. She's jumping on the lounge, delighted that there is no day care today.

You put the drops in your eyes first, she counters, and so I put a drop in each eye, which makes my mascara run and my eyes sting. All weekend I've been dying to rub the itching out of them, sure that I've managed to catch it too. *Terrible drops! No wonder she hates them.*

And then, with the reasonable stage of the discussion over, she goes into flat protest, struggling and hitting, and squeezing her eyes so tightly that not a skerrick can enter.

Sophie! We've been struggling like this all weekend. If I can't get the drops in she'll never get better, and if she doesn't get better, I'll never get any work done.

My head is tighter and tighter. The lists which obsess me are obsessed with our vineyard and its people, which is tiny in the scheme of things.

And yet there's not so much difference between us and anyone else. Like businesses everywhere, we're struggling with endless rounds of not-enoughness. There are never enough of us to do what needs to be done, there's never enough time to do it. And when we've done it, is what we've done enough?

Business has never been harder – business...life... – I hear it again and again. Everywhere people are stretched to the very limits of their emotional and physical capacity. And yet, and yet, more is needed....

Sophie! *Even without her sickness, it was going to be a day of impossible juggling. And now!*

Sophie! *How she shakes my world into proportions I would never have found alone.*

One Sunday in winter, I had walked along the pier in Port Melbourne, exhausted by the wine business, by my daughters and by the holiday we were supposed to be having,

which wasn't working out. While they slept, I walked and walked and watched the families I saw.

Children wear you down, I had told my boyfriend of the time, when he had been outraged that Sophie had made a pie from his IAMS catfood. The water and lovely dried nuts had filled her plump fingers with delight. *Bon Bon!*, she had called, sure that the cat would reward her with a delighted miaow and a lick of her fingers.

You should have known I'd be upset, my boyfriend had told me. I had spent half the day tidying up the house so it would not be shaken to its roots by the combined efforts of two little girls. It had seemed to me that on the list of things a two-year-old could possibly do, the pie was one of the more constructive!

Children wear you down. Sometimes it seems they are asking more of you than you have within you to give. **And it's not just children.**

The challenges are coming at all of us us thick and fast. **The world is changing like quicksilver, beneath our very fingertips, before our eyes. And if we let ourselves, we can feel it - in our bellies, in the depths of our souls.**

Did I think a new black diary would make the revolution easier?

So, as Emma and Sophie slept, babysat by my reluctant boyfriend, I fled to the water's edge, exhausted beyond expression by life and by loving, which turns me inside-out.

I fled, but there was no fleeing my heart. In tune with my walking, deep in my body I felt the pull of my tie to my girls, to my Mum. ***The tie-lines of care link us, one generation to the other, one mother to the next.***

And at the pier, I saw children – children and their mothers, rollerblading, on bikes, in prams. I watched the palpable web of connection between them.

It struck me then, that though the generations go back, there comes a point where you become the source.

Mum minds my girls for me, when the balls get dropped in my precarious juggling act, but my Grandmother can't be there for her. She has just-turned 99 and is in a nursing home. Mum takes her in singlets and stockings and pretty scarves and bucketloads of care.

I stood at the water's edge, filled with the tides of motherlove, and felt it turn me inside out again.

It's Mum I miss this morning, as I struggle with Sophie to put the drops in her eyes.

Sophie! I struggle, frustrated-tears-in my eyes, drops-not-in hers.

In the end I give it up, and I pile Sophie into her new big-girls seat, along side the leather-bound blackness of the diary, and head to work to sort something – anything - out.

I think of the diary, with the urgent items which wont be crossed off today. Though I can feel the scream in my belly that wants to come out, I know that Sophie, in her irreverent screwing up of her eyes, has reminded me of something.

She's reminded me of who I am and where I sit in the web of life's loving. Things I hadn't listed in my diary at all.

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Nicola Hoskins, October 2002