

## **In a bushfire, are stuffed toys really what matter most?**

*A mum's perspective.*

My daughter is watching me.

Checking if I'm okay.

I have to be calm; I have to be cool.

I *have* to be okay.

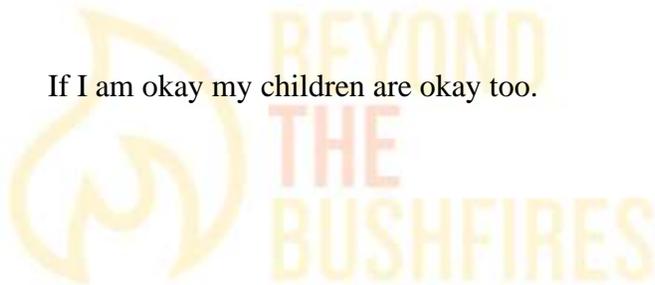
If I am okay my children are okay too.

My mind is racing.

*How can I make the threat of bushfire, the least traumatic experience as possible, for my children?*

In a world where kids have way too much stuff, and an abundance of toys, is an added.

weight on almost every mother's shoulders...



stuffed toys were fast becoming the bane of my existence.

They seemed to multiply, exponentially, at a rate of knots... regardless of any strategies I tried to implement.

Numerous toys strewn across the floor creating a constant obstacle course to navigate.

It was always too hard for my girls to get rid of any.

*They all had names and my girls loved them all.*

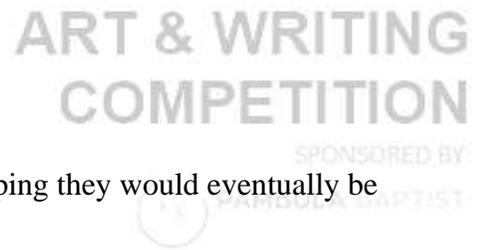
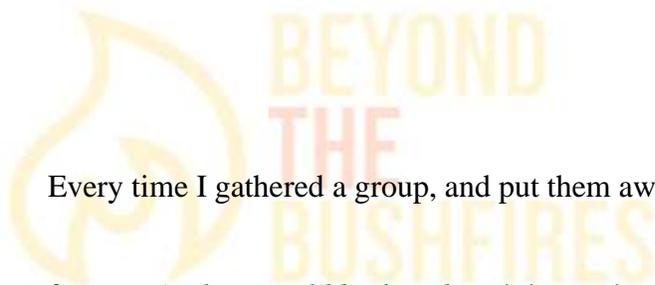
Every time I gathered a group, and put them away, (hoping they would eventually be forgotten), *they would be found*, and the stash quickly returned to their designated homes.

‘You weren’t getting rid of our special toys...*were you, Mum?!*’

They would promptly exclaim.

Implying, of course, ...

*‘How could you?’*

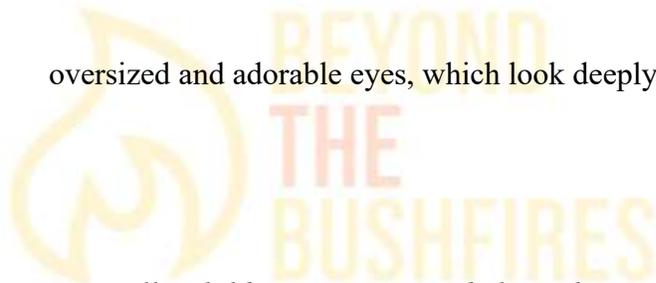


Even after I forbid my girls, from asking us to purchase any more stuffed toys, they would continue to flow in... from relatives and friends, for birthdays and Christmas's.

A couple more were always on their wish lists.

Marketers really know how to target kids. Right?!

I mean to say, 'What child doesn't want to own a complete collection of TY toys, with their oversized and adorable eyes, which look deeply and lovingly into your soul.'



*Naturally, children are going to believe these toys have feelings.*

*And so...*

When a bushfire threatens, and you have to make choices about who to take with you...and

they *all* look longingly at you, pleading, 'Pick me!' *How could you choose?*

Short answer is...

'You can't.'

*So why was I so surprised* that when I instructed my daughters to collect their most special things, a pile of plush grew to mountainous proportions.

Out they stepped.

Arms laden.

With each trip back to their rooms, a look of simple satisfaction grew on their little faces... showing they were proud to be rescuing their dear ones,

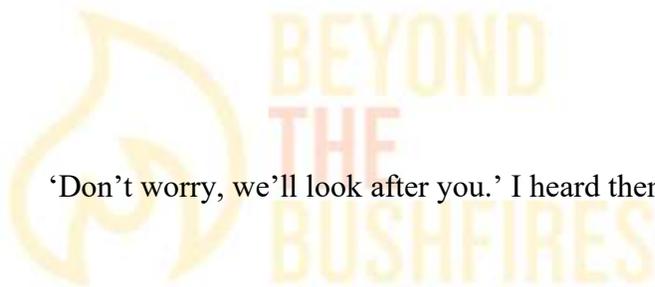
‘Don’t worry, we’ll look after you.’ I heard them say.

As I watched them, gently and calmly, carry and caress each one, I thought to myself,

‘I just want to look after YOU like this too’...

*and make this the least traumatic experience for you, as is humanly possible.*

I felt I could achieve this if I could remain calm, and not show any outward signs of the immense panic now building as their special things crowded our exit area...



and spilled into the living room.

Calmly I tried stating,

‘That’s way too many you will need to put some back.’

Which of course, was met with huge resistance.

‘NOOOOOO’... they both wailed.

This emotional outburst signaled to me that my girls sensed things were getting serious.

The thought of *any* one of their furry friends going up in flames was worrying...

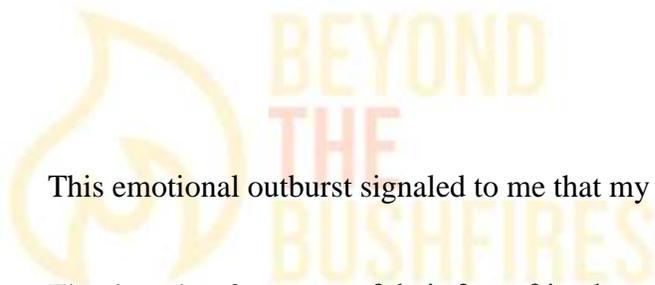
an image too disturbing for them to deal with now.

Even though my heart understood this, my head was telling me *I had to be firm*.

This just wasn’t practical!

‘Put some back please!’ I repeated,

*‘You can’t take this many!’*



Their looks of pride, from just a few minutes ago, were now looks of panic.

Tears started to fall in despair and desperation, as my girls realised, that making choices of who to leave behind, was a task, too tough for them to handle.

The stuffed toy issue was causing emotions to become unsettled, and calm was being overtaken by fear.

My eldest daughter kept looking at me.

Constantly checking if I was alright.

*Because she knew...*

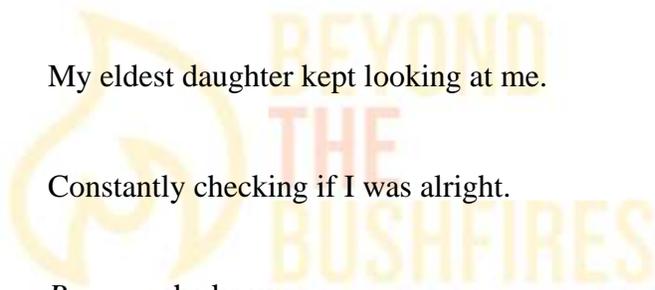
if mum's alright, then we're alright.

I HAD to be alright!

I couldn't let STUFFED TOYS bring us all unhinged.

BUT WHAT DO I DO NOW?

**GOD HELP ME!**



**I just wanted to get out of here, it was beginning to feel like hell on earth.**

**Ash and embers were falling, and the sky was bright red, and threatening.**

**And then it went dark.**

*In the afternoon!*

**The sky was black,**

*as if it was midnight.*

**It was weird and it was...eerie!**

I decided it was time to start thinking about treasures I should start gathering.

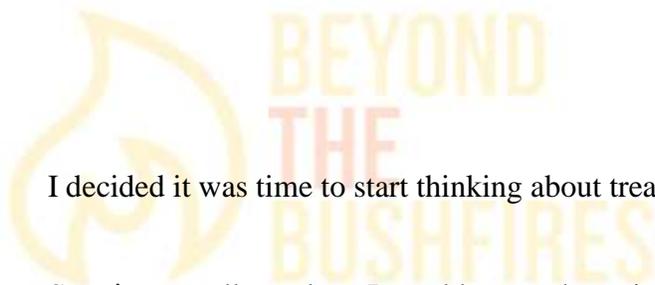
So...in case all was lost, I would not end up pining for them later.

I always thought I had lots of treasures, (mainly due to my cupboards being full of things, I

had decided at some point I couldn't part with.) but at this moment in time...

nothing of any importance was coming to mind.

This felt confusing and worrying.



'I can't leave with nothing.

I must have *some* stuff I value.

Surely there's something...

Think, think, think.

*Nothing.'*

Nothing materialistic seemed important anymore.

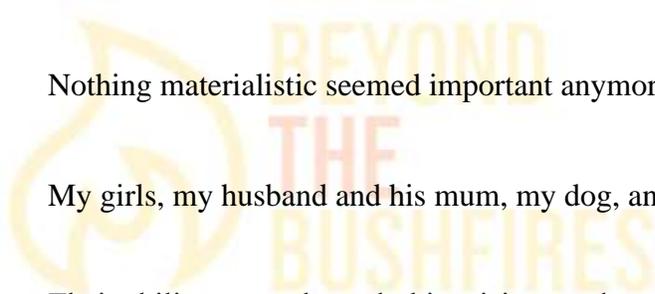
My girls, my husband and his mum, my dog, and their well-being was what mattered.

Their ability to get through this crisis... and cope beyond the bushfires.

Their mental health...'Come what may.'

*The least traumatic experience possible, I reminded myself.*

Then it dawned on me.



Life beyond the bushfires was going to be alright for my girls as long as they had,

*their family...*

and at their tender young ages,

*this family,*

*included* their comforting accumulation of stuffed toys.

These toys, for them, represented peace, harmony, happiness, and comfort.



Now it was clear to me...

If my children felt more able to cope and keep calm and happy because they believed they were rescuing things they were responsible for...*and loved dearly!* Then I say ...

‘Let them come.

Pack them all.’

*Because...as a mum,*

I came to the very surprising realisation,

that in the 2019/2020 bushfires,

other than, people and pets,

for our family...

*stuffed toys, really were what mattered most!*

