

Krissa's story – my 1970's skin.

Krissa Wilkinson was born in Melbourne, the only surviving child who grew up on a housing commission estate. As a young woman, she lived in the bohemian suburbs of Carlton and Fitzroy, as well as the Dandenong Ranges before moving to the Mid North Coast in 1982. Like many of her ilk, basking in the summer sun in search of a golden tan was par for the course, and Krissa took it one step further by acquiring an all-over tan.

Years later a 'weird' mole on Krissa's arm was diagnosed as a melanoma. Hence Krissa discovered (the hard way) that there was a price to pay for her carefree, 1970s sun-loving lifestyle.

20 years later, Krissa takes better care of her skin, undergoes regular check-ups and her melanoma has not returned.

She agreed to share her story as a means of highlighting the stark contrast in awareness regarding the dangers of sun exposure compared to her youth.

"In the seventies, I was part of a radical Melbourne community of artists, academics, actors and activists. We believed in living and loving freely, nudity was encouraged, even seen as a revolutionary act.

Getting a tan in the scorching Melbourne sun was a popular pastime; if you were sunburned badly then there was the fun of peeling your skin off. Despite our education and lifestyle, we were unaware of the harm in sunbaking.

The seventies were also when I became a muse/model for several artists. Those were the days of our bodies ourselves, empowerment and body hair! Being brown all over seemed aesthetically pleasing, rather than stripping off to reveal ugly white patches."

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"In the nineties, 1997 in fact twenty years ago, Beau my then teenage son, just happened to comment on a weird mole on the back of my left arm. A colleague at work also noticed it. So, I went to see my GP Brenton Schuetz, who agreed it was suspicious and sent a biopsy away.

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The news was as they say, fast and furious. Full of fear I travelled to Sydney to see melanoma specialist Professor William McCarthy for surgery at the Royal Prince Alfred.

I refused a general anaesthetic, unaware of how long I would have to lay on the stretcher, under glaring lights in theatre while a team masked in green, tugged at my flesh.

Recovery was a shock, as I shared a room with so many strangers at sea with their emotions. Frightened people, battered and bandaged and uncertain. A silent natural disaster had swept us here.

I was so lucky to be referred to McCarthy and exceptionally fortunate that I had what he called a young melanoma, that had not penetrated the epidermis of my skin.

Post operation lab tests confirmed this, so they were 99% sure they had captured it all. Just to be sure they had removed two inches of flesh around the mole. Still I returned to Sydney for five years for check-ups and examinations.

During this time, my oldest friend was diagnosed with advanced throat cancer and I became one of her carers after surgeons used her intestines to reconstruct her esophagus and throat. My scare was thrown into perspective and I had faith in the team at the RPA.

My body is now a palimpsest of all the years of living, all the barnacles from skin damage, tiny varicose veins from childbirth and a scar on my left arm that resembles the bite mark of a white pointer shark."



Krissa (right) and Jackie Beckhurst work on the mosaic mandala, which forms part of the new meeting space at Wauchope Arts Hall designed by Jo Davidson.

“These days I wear block out, hats and veils in the summer. I still sit for artists and I long to bask in the sun, but I shield my skin, and say a prayer of thanks.

I still enjoy being in the outdoors and spending time in the garden. I try to walk my amazing dog Riff first thing in the morning, before the heat of the sun is too intense.

My experience with melanoma shook me, and is an ever-present reminder of impermanence and my determination to truly be here now.”

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Thank you for sharing Krissa



Krissa (left) performing with her life-long friend Trish, at a festival in Melbourne in the mid 1970s.



Krissa Wilkinson



Wauchope Arts Hall audiences appreciate Krissa's passion for bringing world-class musicians and creative arts projects to the humble hall.

More about Krissa

Krissa Wilkinson is an artist, writer, cultural activist, arts administrator and former teacher. She enjoys music, singing, gardening and plays ukulele. Her two sons Beau and Hari also share her passion for music and our natural environment.

Krissa's creative talents have taken many forms over the years. In Melbourne in the 1970s she wrote and performed in plays featuring feminist and anti-violence themes, at the Pram factory.

Locally she's been the driving force behind the much-loved Wauchope Community Arts Council for over 20 years, drawing a constant stream of local and internationally acclaimed musicians, artists and other creative events to the iconic Arts Hall.

As a co-founder of the Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group, Krissa is part of a team working to raise awareness about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers and to challenge myths.

A keen writer and story hunter, Krissa has collected a number of local stories, some of which have been transformed into installations, performance art projects and oral histories for radio broadcast.

As a practicing artist, Krissa has explored a variety of mediums and forms. She enjoys mosaics and sculpture, working on community-led public art projects as well as private commissions. Where possible she works with recycled materials, transforming discarded objects into things of beauty!

Krissa has a diverse circle of friends, and enjoys hosting touring musicians and other visitors in her colourful and eclectic Port Macquarie home. She and her partner Michael also host refugee families as part of the 'Home among the gumtrees' project.



One of Krissa's recycled glass mandalas, a private commission.

"Our Stories" Project – empowering people to share their stories.

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Contact: OurStoriesProject1@gmail.com



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For more information or to read Krissa's story online go to www.hastingscancertrust.org.au.