

# Behind the Limestone

## Authors notes:

This might sound corny, but someone asked me as we were sitting around a campfire, Does anyone know of any ghost stories? Well, we had visited a tourist cave that day, and the events of that day inspired me to tell this story. I'll call it, 'Behind the Limestone'.

## Chapter one Seabed

It was a beautiful day for a drive; it was the time of the season when the oceans were too far for a swim, and the mountains too high for a camp. So, an adventure had to be met somewhere out in the country. A family of four decided to venture out into the remote town of Wee Jasper in New South Wales. The drive would take them down Mountain Creek Road through the limestone region, situated between the Murrumbidgee River to the east and the Brindabella Ranges to the west. An ancient seabed creates a stretch of limestone. The sea is no longer, and what is left are rock formations that lie over 50 kilometres away. The corrugated rocks have an interesting phenomenon; most boulders have sharp peak edges, which seem to be positioned as though somebody has ploughed the gravel on a field. The sea coral maneuvered the limestone, creating an opening and closing caves.

They had heard of a famous cave in the heart of the region. The drive was long, and the family decided to stop for a break on the side of the road. Out towards the hills, you could see the exposed boulders peeking out of the ground. With curiosity, the two boys burst out of the back seats and ran towards the limestone fields. The mother yelled out to the oldest boy to watch out, with a reply of,

"Yeah, Ma, no worries",

The boys decided to play a jumping game across the rocks. The parents were happy for the boys to go off and play; it had been a long trip. The oldest boy ran ahead as fast as he could towards the strange-looking fields. The youngest, Jeremy, was trying to catch up and yelled out to his brother,

"Joey! Wait up."

As Joey stopped, the youngest yelled, "Joey! You are always leaving me behind. Why don't you wait up for me?" To which Joey replied,

"Too bad! If you can't keep up, you will be left behind".

The boys made up a game, pretending to be in a swamp covered in lava, where they had to jump from rock to rock. The long grass was spitting lava. The top of the rocks was very sharp, and it was hard for them to keep their balance. At times, they would slip and fall onto the grass, resulting in a minus point being scored. After 15 minutes, the parents decided to pack up their afternoon tea and resume their journey. The mother yelled,

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"Boys! Time's up"

Joey immediately jumped off his rock and sprinted back to the car without looking back. Jeremy yelled

"Hey, wait up"

He had been negotiating this jump and decided to take the plunge. He over-jumped the 2-metre distance and landed on his bum, sliding down the rock. Instead of stopping at the base of the rock, he seemed to be falling further through the grass and into a hole. The void was hidden, and the entry was the size of a basketball. He tried to grab the grass as he fell, but with no footholds, he fell through a tunnel and into an intense, dark chamber. He slid down and stopped in a very dark and slimy place. The darkness was complete, as though somebody had turned out the lights. He tried to stand up but felt excruciating pain in his legs. In a panic, he tried to brace himself by putting his hands on the slimy sidewalls of the limestone cave. Everything he touched was wet. It was too dark; he couldn't even see his hands in front of his eyes. He called out to Joey from where he stood. The nature of the cabin softened the sound in the chamber. The darkness, the cold, the emptiness and the pain caused the boy to break down and cry. The sound of his crying could barely be heard from the surface above.

When Joey got back to the car, his mother asked him,

"Where, Jeremy?"

He turned around to see no sign of him. They all went to search for Jeremy. They called JEREMY! JEREMY, but there was no answer. Little did they know what the next twenty-four hours would bring.



## Author's notes:

The drive from Canberra to Wee Jasper can be taken in two ways: via the Wee Jasper Road from the north and the Mountain Creek Road from the south. The shorter route is Mountain Creek Road, which is also a pleasant drive, offering a scenic view of the rolling hills, farmland, and natural pine forests. When you turn

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off Mountain Creek Rd onto Wee Jasper Rd, the road climbs up to the tablelands and meanders through cliff-face road edges. It is not for the light-hearted, and along this stretch of road are some spectacular limestone rock formations.

## Chapter Two: Sense of Dread

The limestone region at Wee Jasper is well known for its caves. People would travel from all over the region to visit these caves. But it was also renowned for its earthquakes. When earth tremors occur, hidden chambers within the limestone caves are either exposed or sealed off from the other internal caves. For cave goers, quakes couldn't be felt under the ground, but could be felt above. The regional cave guides would often tell the tour groups about this phenomenon.

On that particular day, an earthquake occurred. Julie, an experienced cave guide, didn't feel the quake during her final tour through the well-known cave. The tourist left the cave unbeknownst to any tremor and was surprised by the disturbance of items around the picnic area. Julie, as she always did, fell behind in turning out the lights and locking the entrance gate to the cave. Unfortunately, there was 10 10-metre stretch from the light switch to the entrance. She would turn off the lights and feel her way towards the entrance. This day, she heard something unusual, and it sounded like a faint cry. She quickly turned the lights back on, realising that she might have left someone behind. The noise stopped as soon as she flicked the lights. She turned and re-entered the cave. She ventured around calling out as she investigated. She searched for over an hour, ensuring she covered every spot. Finding nothing, she eventually gave up and went back to lock up. She turned off the lights, and soon, the faint sound could be heard. But this time louder as though it was near her. She turned on the lights, and it stopped. Concerned, she needed to get help. With the lights turned off, she started for the entrance and suddenly felt a chill as she walked. The feeling she felt was as though someone had walked onto her grave. At the opening, the feeling gave way to a sense of loss. A feeling of being left behind, and all hope is lost. She phoned her boss, and he mentioned that he had heard the same sound locking up the night before. He also investigated the noise source and couldn't find it. She finished the call and went to her car. At the car, her spirits were low, and she was starting to feel achy and painful. The drive back home was long and lonely.

When she got home, she still felt ill. The ill feeling reminded her of how she had felt years earlier when her younger brother had turned up at home with a dead duck. He wanted to cook it and eat it. Disgusted, she had asked him, How did you get it. He said, "I was skipping rocks on the lake and when the duck flew by, I managed to hit it. It was so funny, how the duck hit the water with a big splash, you should have seen it", he bragged. Her sympathy towards animals was strong, and she was most upset with him. Her brother was a cheeky troublemaker and would often joke around with her. The duck incident, he had gone too far, and she was most displeased with him. After that, she noticed that her actions toward him were different. She had lost contact with him over the years and knew very little about her brother's life. She was curious at times about what he was up to. Something better than wandering around a deep, dark cave, she thought. Her sour mood continued, and she went straight to bed. Once in bed, she felt feverish and had a slight chill. She eventually managed to doze.

*A boy was sitting in the doctor's waiting room with a sense of dread. He was waiting for the doctor to see him about his problem. His mother, sitting beside him, was also concerned. His school teacher had recommended that he see a specialist. The doctor had conducted some tests and was now waiting for the results. There was one result he dreaded: being sent to a specialised school and having to take medicine. All this meant that he wasn't a normal kid. The last thing the boy wanted to do was attend a special school. The waiting room was quiet when the doctor came out. The doctor instructed them to come to his office. As the boy walked past the receptionist, he feared his fate was sealed. The boy sat down in a comfy seat next to his mother. The doctor had one of those swingy ball things on a tripod swinging on his desk. The boy couldn't stop looking at it. Memorised by its swinging back and forth, back and forth. The doctor looked concerned,*

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*he said "Well I think I know what the problem is" He looked at the boy, he got out of his seat and walked around the desk continually staring at the boy, The boy looked up and the strangeness of the doctor's eyes had the boys on edge, the boy's fate was decided at that moment and the boy knew what the problem was all this time and the doctor confirmed it The doctor with a stone-cold look said "You left him behind boy, you left him to die, Joey!"*]

Julie woke up drenched in sweat, the fever had broken, and she lay there contemplating the dream about the boy. Julie couldn't remember how she got there. It was a moonless night, and the darkness was so great that Julie couldn't see her hand in front of her face. She felt a little relieved as though a huge weight was lifted off her shoulders. She remembered the cave and the sound that had haunted her. She was then disturbed by a noise outside her bedroom. She lived on a farm where there was an old dormitory-style hut. The hut used to be the shearing quarters for the farm. The rectangular-shaped quarters had a veranda that wrapped around the perimeter. The shelter had no internal hallway but was designed so that each room exits onto the terrace. The sound was a thudding noise, like a sack of potatoes being beaten across the floorboards. The noise came from just outside her door. She turned on her bedside light, and the beating stopped. Perhaps whatever it was startled by the light and froze. She paused. She was reminded of the noise in the cave, which would stop when the lights were out. She experimented by flicking the light switch off. The thumping sound started to move away from the door. The repetitive noise would be fainter and then louder, as though it were moving around the cabin. Her heart would beat with every thump. As the sound came closer to her door, she called out.

"Who's there?"

The thumping stopped, and then she was overwhelmed by an aroma. The familiar smell of dampness, the scent she had become so accustomed to, the aroma of the cave.



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## Chapter Three Bilby's

The hormone Melatonin, produced in the brain's pineal gland, is known as the "sleep or darkness hormone." Melatonin encourages sleep by sending a signal to the brain that it is time to rest. This signal helps initiate the body's physiological preparations for sleep, as muscles relax and a feeling of drowsiness sets in. Humans need sleep because it is the only way the body can slow down enough to cleanse the brain from its waste. Humans are conditioned to be conscious for 16 hours and sleep for eight hours based on a typical Earth day. The body needs sleep time to refresh itself and be ready for another day of consciousness. So, when you lie in darkness, the body thinks it's time to sleep, and when you see the light, it's time to be awake.

Jeremy had been asleep for some time, and when he awoke, he wasn't sure he was awake or still sleeping. He was sure he had his eyes open, but the darkness in the cave was still there. Jeremy could move his body, and the pain in his legs had subsided. He moved his hand around, and he could still feel the sliminess of the cave walls next to him. Tears welled up as he was reminded of the situation. He called out again to Joey, hoping that he could be heard and that this was all a joke. Frustrated, he tried to move, hoping to climb up to where he had fallen. It was too dark, and so there was no clue about which way to go. He felt wedged in, and it was hard for him to move around. He lay there for quite some time.

The darkness reminded him of the night before, when he and his brother had gone to an amusement park. His parents had taken them around to all the rides and sideshows where they would shoot at or throw things to get prizes. He was so fixated on this basketball game. If he shot three baskets in a row, he would win a toy Nerf machine gun. This machine gun could shoot twenty Nerf pods at a time, and he was thinking of Joey being his target. But he managed to get only the second prize. The prize was a bag of glow sticks. Disappointed from not getting the major award, he was intrigued by the glow sticks. He took two out of the bag and tossed one to his brother, jamming the bag into his pocket. They both broke the tube compound, causing it to glow. Then they swirled them around and around. It was fun for a while until they got bored with it and went on to explore other rides.

He wished he had the glow sticks now. He remembered that he hadn't changed from yesterday and reached into his pocket, hoping to feel the bag. Jeremy became excited when he felt the glow sticks. He took one out. He knew he had to break the compound, so he quickly bent the tube. The darkness remained, no light illuminating from the stick. Perhaps the compound was mixed while in his pocket. He reached in for another with the same result. Determined, he reached for another, noting that there were only two left, broke it, and instantly the cave came to light. The luminescence of the stick in daylight was minimal, but in total darkness, it produced enough light for him to see around the cave.

He noticed the cave was like being in a large tube. Looking up into the ceiling, he could see the narrow tube from which he came. He seemed to be at the base of the chamber. The ceiling looked too high and difficult to get to, and appeared to be a tight squeeze. Gravity must have assisted him in getting through the small cavity, but it would be a deterrent from getting back up through it. He looked around and saw an opening that appeared to be a larger chamber. He got up and crawled through the opening, finding that the chamber was large enough for him to stand. His legs were sore, but he could still climb. Remembering that the glow sticks had a limited time, he went around the chamber to see if there was another way up.

The larger chamber had another opening, so he went through to explore. After some time, the cave proved to be a maze of small and large chambers. He found moving through the cave painful and exhausting, as it was hard to climb, and sometimes he had to crawl due to the smoothness and sliminess of the limestone. When the glow stick started to dim, Jeremy reached into his pocket to pull out the last one. Nervous, he bent it, and fortunately, it came to light. He had more time. The brighter light made him notice an opening at the top of the cave, and he managed to climb up to it. The slippery rocks made it difficult, but he persisted. He was

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hopeful that if he went through the opening, he would be able to see the exit, but unfortunately, it never came. He had reached a dead end, and the only way out was back down to the larger chamber. He lay there exhausted, too tired to move, and he closed his eyes. While he was asleep, the glow stick dimmed and eventually went out.

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Julie lay still on the bed, entranced by the sight of the door; the smell was strong but not overpowering. She could hear a rumbling noise in the distance, and then it became louder; the bed started to shake. She was locked into a trance, and the earthquake had helped her snap out of it. She turned on the light. The picture frame of her parents fell off the dresser, and other items around the room had toppled as well. She recognised it as an occasional tremor and waited for it to stop. The noise outside her bedroom had moved from the veranda to the back lawn. She got up and cautiously opened the door.

The light from her bedroom provided enough light for her to see a small animal moving towards the back fence. The animal appeared to be carrying a bag in its mouth. She recognised the bag and the animal. She was relieved to see what the unknown noise was. The bag was a small feedbag that she had been using to feed the birds in the yard. This animal had other ideas. One of Julie's hobbies, which had brought her to this place, was studying the *Macrotis Lagotis* species, otherwise known as the Greater Bilby.

She had heard through her university course that there was a farmer, from the Wee Jasper region, who was breeding Bilbys on his land. Back in the '60s, the farmer had travelled around West Australia looking for the Bilbys. He found and captured a family of Bilbys and brought them back to New South Wales. The Bilby is a small, nocturnal marsupial that was nearly extinct due to the presence of wild cats, dogs, and foxes. The Bilbys were forced out into remote desert areas where their predator populations were limited. However, bringing the Bilbys into his environment would be a challenge. For the Bilbys to survive, he would have to control the population of the local cats, dogs and foxes. It had taken weekly spotlighting trips to ensure they were safe from their predators.

When she came to live in the quarters, there was a condition that she wasn't allowed to bring either cats or dogs. She was sad when she left her Buster at her parents' home. She felt at times that a canine would have been a perfect companion, especially when coping with strange noises in the night.

Julie stepped off the veranda and into the darkness to retrieve her feed bag. The Bilby slipped through the back fence and hopped down past the back paddock. Julie noticed the light in the eastern sky and knew that the sunrise was imminent. She was hopeful of tracking the marsupial critter to see where it had gone. She followed the long-nosed, snouted creature for quite a while until it got to a large limestone rock formation. She was able to see it better now that the sun had risen. It was a nocturnal animal and, at any moment, it would find its burrow and lie for the day. She lost sight of the Bilby after it hopped over the rock formation. When she got to the boulders, she peeked over, just in time to see the Bilby drop down into its burrow. She was annoyed that it got away, but happy that she knew of the lair. Her concentration was interrupted by a commotion of noise to her right. She looked over and couldn't believe what she saw.

There was another rock formation, but this time it was shaped like a formation of quacking ducks. What made it so strange was that the eight or nine ducks were positioned in a perfect circle around this boulder, quacking aggressively at it. She went to investigate, and when she arrived at the boulder, the ducks dispersed and quacked away. She noticed a depression in the earth, and at the base was a deep, dark void.

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## Chapter Four: A light in the darkness

*The boy felt as though he was flying through a dark tunnel; it was as if he were in the front carriage of a roller coaster ride, being pulled along towards the light at the end. He noticed the strange figures on the tunnel wall alongside the carriage. They were images and carvings similar to those found on a totem pole. Somehow, the figures on the walls were showing him something, and he couldn't quite understand what it meant. It was, though, the figures that were encouraging him to look towards the light. He focuses his attention on what was approaching; it appeared to be an animal on the side of the track. It looked like a fox hunched down looking his way. Its eyes seemed to reflect two spotlights. The fox continues to stare at the boy, and the boy feels spooked. As the carriage passed the fox, the fox turned his head towards the light. Another figure was approaching; this figure was more petite and resembled the most enormous rat he had ever seen. It had floppy ears, a long snout and was about the size of a cat. It looks like a cross between a rat and a kangaroo. It had a bag in its mouth. As the carriage rolled by, it dropped the bag and turned its head towards the light. As the transport got closer to the light, he noticed a badling of ducks in front of the carriage quacking aggressively at him. The carriage came to a stop; he believed the ducks were stopping him from getting out of this creepy tunnel. He reached out towards the end, willing the carriage to continue. The light was too bright, and he turned his head away.*

Jeremy opened his eyes with his arm covering his face. He was lying on his back with his head turned to the side. Jeremy lay there for a while thinking of the dream. He was admiring the sliminess of the cave walk. He could hear a drip. He suddenly realised that if he could see the wall, then there must be light. He took his arm away from his face and looked up towards the ceiling of the cave to see a bright light. The bright light hurt his eyes, and he closed them. With excitement, he opens them again, only to close them. After a minute, he squinted his eyes enough to keep them open. He could see the blue sky through the hole. He got up to see if he could get to the hole, but it was too high. He kept looking at it. Suddenly, the light went dim, and so did the light in the cave. With his eye fixed on the hole, he could make out a face. It was the face of a woman looking into the cave. He yelled out, "Help me!"

When Julie got to the rock formation, wondering what all the commotion was about with the ducks. She saw in the middle of the depression a small sinkhole. She was familiar with the area, but hadn't noticed it before. From her experience as a cave guide and the stories she told, caves can sometimes open up and close again through the occurrence of earthquakes. She wondered whether this hole had opened up that morning due to the earthquake. She knelt to take a look. She knew that she had to be careful because looking down into any hole in Australia might bring a surprise. The opening was the size of a basketball and appeared to be deep and dark. She slowly peeked into the hole, and when she did, she could hardly see anything because her head had blocked out the light. She was being careful, and with any movement, she would be ready to jump out of the way. When she heard the sound of a boy's voice, it frightened her, and she instinctively jumped up out of the depression. With all the strangeness of this morning, it was getting stranger. Gathering her thoughts together, she realised that what she heard could be real and that someone might be down there. She slowly went back to the hole and called into the void, "Hello".

Jeremy's hopes were lost when the hole became brighter, and the face was gone. He stared at the opening, wishing for the face to appear again. He called out again and again, but there was nothing. After some time looking and hoping, she appeared. This time, the woman had called out "Hello!" Jeremy responded and told her that he was stuck down there. She said, "Can you make your way up somehow?" and Jeremy looked around, seeing that the hole was too high above him. Her hand had appeared and was trying to reach down to help him up, but he tried to jump up and grab on, only to find it was too high. He made several attempts without success. She told him she had an idea and would be back shortly.

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Julie got up from her position and looked around for a long piece of wood. It was an old trick for cave guides to carry a stick just in case somebody had fallen somewhere in the caves. She searched around and found the perfect branch. She would stick the branch down the hole where he could hold on to it while she pulled him up. She was hoping the boy was light enough. The opening was small, but she worked out that a little boy could fit through it. She yelled out to the boy about her intentions. She poked the branch down far enough for him to grab on. She felt the resistance, and she yelled,

"Are you ready?" she asked, and she could hear the positive reply.

The little boy was light, and she managed to pull the branch up; all of a sudden, the weight felt light again, like a fish that had got away. She pushed the stick lower, thinking that the boy must have slipped off the limb. She felt the resistance and pulled the branch up again. She could brace her feet on either side of the hole to get leverage. She pulled up the branch about a foot, and the weight went light again. She pulled the branch out of the tunnel.

She peeked through and asked if he was alright. He said that his hands kept slipping. She looked at the straight limb and took off her shirt, wrapped it around the thinner part of the branch, and poked it down the hole. She again felt the resistance, hoping that he was holding on to the other end. She started to pull up again, this time she felt the weight and kept pulling. She could see his hands coming through the hole, and she adjusted her grip to grab onto the wrists. With success, she grabbed onto both hands and slowly pulled him out of the hole. She lost her balance and fell backwards with the boy on top of her. She held him for a long time and was satisfied that he was safe.

Jeremy was anxious when he saw the branch. He grabbed onto it and held on for his life, but his hands kept slipping. When the branch came down the second time with a cloth wrapped around it, Jeremy grabbed onto it, which seemed to give him a better grip. He was worried that he wouldn't fit through the hole, but he fit through okay. He could feel her hands grabbing him and helping him through. When he was through the hole, he landed on her as she fell down and in her arms. He lay there for a while, crying. Then he got up and realised that she was half-naked and jumped up, not knowing what to do.

Julie felt the boy pull away and look at her bosom. She suddenly realised the situation and grabbed the branch, unwrapping her shirt, and put it on. The tense moment was compounded with awkwardness and a sense of relief. Then they both looked at each other and burst out laughing hysterically.

She remembered her Uni lecturer once said, "Laughter is known to establish a positive emotional climate and a sense of connection between two people. Therefore, levity is known to defuse anxiety and stress and pave the way for intimacy."

Julie hadn't had a good laugh for a very long time, and with the morning she had, it was long overdue. She asked the boy how he got down there. When he replied, it was as if the floodgates had opened, and he was telling his story, while she struggled to keep up. He was telling her how he had been playing with his brother, Joey, when he fell into a hole. He mentioned that he had glow sticks, which he won the night before, and were still in his pocket. He said he used them to search around for a cave opening. When the last glow stick went out, he thought he was done. He said that he fell asleep and had a bizarre dream about a roller coaster ride, and that he saw a strange small animal like a cross between a Kangaroo and a rat. When he woke up, he saw the opening.

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Julie was flabbergasted. She also remembers the dream she had about the boy named Joey, which Jeremy was describing, and which seemed like a Greater Bilby in her dream. She wondered whether there was a connection. Julie told Jeremy that she would help him back to her quarters, and it was a short drive to Wee Jasper to look for his family.

Wee Jasper is a small village with a general store, post office, a few houses and a park. When Julie turned into the Wee Jasper T-junction, she could see two police vehicles parked outside the general store. Julie knew that they must be searching for the boy. She parked, and they both went to the door.

When she opened the door, she looked across the room and was surprised to see a familiar face. It was the face of a lost long brother, John. When her brother looked over towards them, Julie noticed that he wasn't aware of her presence but was looking down at the boy. John quickly ran to Jeremy and gave him a big hug. She made the connection that the boy must be his son. Women and another boy came across the room to join in. They broke away from their embrace, and John looked over at her. His face showed a mix of confusion and surprise. Julie smiled and reached over to give him a bigger hug. John introduced his family, and they went outside to the adjacent park to sit down and tell their stories. The police were lingering nearby, also to take down their stories.

After an unusual morning, Julie had invited them back to her quarters to stay and catch up. As she led them back to her home, she reflected on the day. The Bilby had drawn her to the cave somehow, and she thought it might be an omen or a foreboding sign. In her studies about the Greater Bilby, she remembered her thesis on the Greater Bilby, and when she researched its totem, it said

"A light in the darkness, where the Bilby is the gentle shadow. It is a solitary creature, intimate with shadows and darkness. It negotiates its way through the heath, sand and earth and teaches us the safety and security that is found in darkness, and it guides those who are scared of the dark."

She remembers how she wrote about it, but was cynical about the idea of a totem. Now, she understood it and was familiar with the concept of how people often discussed fate and chance in the same sentence. It was certainly the case today. She smiled, and then she remembered the circle of ducks, which drew her to the hole. The ducks in Jeremy's dream and the ducks her brother had killed so long ago. She wondered whether there was a connection. She shook her head and said,

'Noooo' and began to laugh again.

The End

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